





ANCIENT INDIAN AND INDO-GREEK THEATRE

M L VARADPANDE

Frontispiece: Dionysus, Gandhara

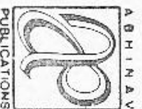




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M L VARADPANDE





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To
Shri Jyotish Dutta Gupta
with affection and esteem.

"यस्यां
गायन्ति नृत्यन्ति
भूम्यां मर्त्याः"

– पृथिवीसूक्त ॥

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Prologue

In the year 326 B.C. an interesting satyric play *Agen* was staged at the jovial Feast of Dionysus held in the military camp of Alexander the Great on the bank of river Hydaspes—Jhelum in Upper Punjab—during his famous Indian campaign.

Only eighteen lines of this play, written by orator Python of Byzantium in the employ of Alexander, have survived. Distinguished German scholar Prof Bruno Snell who has analysed and reconstructed the play feels that it is based on historical facts. It speaks of Harpalos, civil administrator of Babylon and a friend of Alexander who recklessly squandered treasury by building a temple in memory of his dead mistress Pythionike and making statues of a beautiful courtesan Glykera who was living with him like a queen.

Prof Snell conjectures that *Agen* is none else but Alexander who might have been appearing in the concluding scene of the play as one of the characters to set the things right. The play enacted in Upper Punjab had a message for ambitious Alexander. Prof Snell writes: "There is scarcely any doubt that *Agen* was performed in public. In that case the soldiers must have listened to it as well, those same soldiers who shortly before had refused—or were about to refuse—to take any further part in adventures eastward . . . Many a Macedonian may have felt distressed during the performance of this merry play which vividly portrayed the dissolute life of a man in a responsible position and the orientalization of the state hierarchy. And Alexander, when he saw himself appear at the end to put everything right, could not ignore the summons to return home at once and take measures against his closest friends."

Was the performance of this play witnessed by Indian audience? Did it exert any influence on local theatrical traditions? We do not know for certain.

However this is one of the numerous evidences indicating some kind of contact between ancient Indian and Greek theatrical arts. A fragment of a vase with a scene from a famous Greek play *Antigone* painted on it was found near Peshawar. An amphitheatre was excavated at Nagarjunakonda which betrayed Greek influence. These and similar other clues inspired me to explore the subject in depth. While I was collecting data my learned friend Shri S.B. Kodad drew my attention to an interesting farce written in Greek and Kannada languages found in Egypt in the year 1899 in an excavation. With the desire of placing all the facts collected by me before the scholars I wrote this book.

For proper understanding of the subject it was essential to give background information about the early Indian theatre. This the readers will find in the first part of the book.

I am grateful to Shobha Varadpande for rendering me all possible help in the various stages of the production of this book. My librarian friend Shri O.N. Chavan helped me in locating references. The credit of bringing out this book in most attractive form certainly goes to Shri Shakti Malik of Abhinav Publications. I am thankful to him.

M.L. VARADPANDE

Indian Theatre: Early Phase



Indra :
Like the winds violently shaking (the trees),
the draughts (of Soma) have
lifted me up.

The draughts (of Soma) have
lifted me up
like swift horses drawing the chariot.

Lo! I will place this earth
(where I will)
either here or there.
I will drive the scorching (sun)
either here or there.

For I have often drunk of Soma.

—*Rig Veda*



Ras

The Origin

While defining drama, Bharata, author of the *Natyashastra*, an encyclopaedic treatise on dramaturgy written in the second century B.C., says:

> Drama is the mimicry of actions and conducts of people (*lokavruttanukaranam*), which is rich in various emotions and which depicts different situations. This will relate to the actions (*karma*) of men . . .

The theatre in its rudimentary form emerged out of primitive man's instinct to imitate the actions of people and also the nature around him. Imitation of action—mimesis—is its basic source, hence Bharata calls it *karmasanshrayam.* Dance is an advanced form of mimetic action. It combines rhythm with pantomime. In primitive society dance appears as a most significant institution. It is performed to influence spirits, cast spells, control epidemics, ensure success in war and in hunting, and also to amuse the spectators. When dance started expressing an idea, communicating an experience, relating an episode, narrating a myth, it started becoming more dramatic.

Primitive communities in India had their own dances which were dramatic in their import. The tradition still continues in ancient tribal communities all over the country. The earliest known record of the existence of the art of dancing, which is called the mother

of theatre, dates back to the Mesolithic period of India's pre-history. It is in the form of simple but expressive dancing figures drawn by the aboriginals on the walls and roofs of their cave shelters around 8000 B.C.

It is in the Upper Paleolithic period that cave paintings started appearing on the scene in India. The earliest drawings representing animals like elephants, bisons, buffaloes are found in the cave shelters of Adamgarh, Kharvai, Bhimbetka, etc. A majority of these painted cave shelters are located in central India. Then appeared dancing figures such as those drawn on the walls of Hospital Hill Caves at Bhopal in red outline. The dominant themes of these ancient cave shelter paintings are animals, hunting, and, of course, dancing. This is a clear indication of the importance dancing had in the life of the primitive man. Apart from its religious and magical functions, it was performed for the recreation of primitive community engaged in a very hard struggle for existence. Dance is the earliest form of theatre.

Dr Wakankar and Dr Brooks in their excellent work, *Stone Age Painting in India*, have described some very interesting dance-scenes of the Mesolithic period adorning the walls of the Bhimbetka cave shelters. In one composition (Fig. 1) four dancers are seen, two standing, one sitting and another taking a leap in the air. The authors call it a Wizard's Dance in which 'one dancer has a bison-horn mask; one a feathered headdress; a third a wolf's head mask and claws and the fourth seems to be taking off in outer space.' In yet another painting of the same period two dancers appear in a majestic stance inspiring awe in the minds of two figures bowing before them. The dancers are in a bison-horn mask and a feathered headdress respectively and seem to be moving in a trance. Hunting dances of about the same period have also been located by these authors among the cave paintings.

Dr Wakankar and Dr Brooks observe that 'in sharp contrast to early rock paintings in eastern Spain, the southern Sahara and the southwestern United States . . . in the artistic tradition of the Indian shelter painters, phallic human figures are very rare.' However rare they may be, their existence among the early dancing figures (Fig. 2) is quite significant. In a rock shelter near Ahiraura the

authors have located three phallic dancers beating cymbals. In another Ahiraura Mesolithic rock painting two phallic dancers are seen with a dog. The association of phallic deities like Pashupati Shiva, and Dionysus with the theatre is very well known.

The later rock paintings depict various interesting dance formations. The earliest *Ras*-like dance formation -- one figure in the centre and eight dancing ones around him in a circle—is found in Simla hill, Bhopal (Fig. 3). Musical instruments also appear in the early historic cave paintings. Men are seen playing on drums, a lyre-like musical instrument, and cymbals (Figs. 4 to 9).

Since its inception, dance has contained the urge to communicate an emotion, an experience, a myth, in a dramatic form. Hence the history of theatre starts with dance. The actor uses masks, colours to paint his body, gestures to communicate, and after the advent of the spoken word, songs, and still later musical instruments. This development is very well recorded in cave paintings ever since the Mesolithic period. Observing the dance patterns and formations of tribal dancers of central India and elsewhere we feel as if the figures drawn on the cave walls have come alive (Figs. 10 to 12). The cave dwellers' static civilization has preserved the ancient dance traditions with not much change. Traditionally inherited dramatic dances still form a part of tribal cultures all over the world, giving a clue to the development of theatre from its most rudimentary form. Explaining the development of theatre from the dramatic dances of the tribals, Sheldon Cheney quotes Loomis Havemeyer's description of tribal Naga war dances of north-east India in his work, *The Theatre*:

> It commences with a review of the warriors who later advance and retreat, parrying blows, and throwing spears as though in real fight. They creep along in battle array, keeping as near the ground as possible so that nothing shows but a line of shields. When they are near enough to the imaginary enemy they spring up and attack. After they have killed the opposing party they grab tufts of grass, which represents the heads, and these they sever with their battle axes. Returning home they carry the clods over their shoulders as they would

the heads of real men. At the village they are met by women who join in triumphant song and dance (Fig. 13).

The cultic ceremonies full of ritualistic dancing, singing and drinking still survive in many primitive tribal communities in different parts of the country. They point at the evolution of theatre from cultic rituals. For instance, the *Baha Bonga*, a ritual ceremony of the Santhal community of Orissa, betrays dramatic traits. At the outskirts of the Santhal village a circular area is marked for the ritualistic performance which is known as *Jahera*. It contains a small hut-like structure made of bamboo poles and leafy branches to house different deities. Sitakant Mahapatra has described in detail this spring festival of Santhals in his work *Bakhen*.

On the festival day people gather at the house of the village priest, then the procession of dancing tribals with the persons possessed by their deities moves towards the *Jahera*. The 'deities' also dance majestically. Women join the procession dancing and singing songs in praise of the 'deities' led by an orchestra of musical instruments. After reaching the holy enclosure the image are worshipped and a sacrifice of goat or fowl is made. Everybody partakes of the holy-food and drink *Handia*, a fragrant rice wine. Then they again dance in a circle joined by the 'deities', i.e., persons possessed by the 'deities'. Drinking of wine is supposed to be most auspicious on such occasions. It is a part of the religious act. In some tribal communities such rituals culminate in orgies. These ceremonies well compare with the early Bacchanalian rites of ancient Greece.

In the form of dancing figures drawn on the walls of cave shelters we get the first faint glimpses of rudimentary theatre silhouetted on the hazy curtain of the distant past. The same distant tradition is reflected in the above mentioned Naga War Dance with more pronounced dramatic element. They together narrate the story of evolution of simple primitive dance forms into somewhat more developed dramatic dances.

In the Neolithic period appeared in the Indian subcontinent a mysterious urban civilization which continued to flourish till *c.* 1500 B.C. The people belonging to this civilization lived in well planned fortified cities enjoying many luxuries unknown to primitive cave dwellers.

The origin of this civilization is shrouded in mystery and we cannot tell whether there was any connection between primitive cave dwellers and the sophisticated urban people belonging to this civilization. Though many of the animals drawn on the walls of cave shelters by the primitive habitants appear on the seals and amulets of these urban people, it seems they lived quite independent of each other with minimum mutual communication. This civilization, popularly known as the Indus valley civilization, seems to have covered parts of the Punjab, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra in addition to the Indus valley. With further excavations new centres of this culture are coming to light.

This rich culture naturally had its own forms of dramatic amusements, in which dance predominates. In addition to terracotta figurines of dancers we find stone and bronze dancing statuettes of great charm. Writing about a male dancing figure carved in greyish limestone, art historian Benjamin Rowland remarks:

> . . . image carved in greyish limestone, represents a dancing male figure, perhaps originally ithyphallic, four armed and three headed. These attributes, together with the dancing pose, make it possible that this is a prototype for the later Hindu conception of Shiva as Lord of the Dance . . . the figure is imbued with a vital, dynamic quality and a suggestion of movement imparted by the violent axial dislocation of the head, thorax, and hips, exactly the same device employed to suggest the violence of Shiva's dance in the great Hindu bronzes of the Chola period (Fig. 14).

This speaks of the amazing continuity of Indian dance traditions through the ages. The style of wearing a number of bangles, *katakavali*, and a necklace with a pendant resting in the deep cleavage between the pair of swelling bosoms adopted by the beautiful later sculptures of dancing *Yakshis* and *Apsaras* and *Surasundaris* adorning stupas and temples.

Mackay in his work, *Further Excavations at Mohenjo-daro*, refers to many dancing figurines. On a seal a number of figures are seen

engaged in dancing (Fig. 16) while one among them is playing on a drum. He describes an interesting seal on which is seen a 'curious figure dancing before an animal.' Mackay feels that 'possibly it represents a human figure wearing a mask and false tail for a ceremonial dance before the deified animal.' The same theme is seen portrayed in cave shelter paintings also. He also refers to a dancing figure with extremely short legs. Speaking about the dwarf he says: 'It is not unlikely that dwarfs were kept to provide amusement and that they were taught to dance as were the dwarfs and pigmies in the royal and the other households of the ancient Egyptians.' It is very interesting to note that the *Pramatha Ganas*, dwarfish attendants of Lord Shiva, are the presiding deities of *Hasya Rasa*, the sentiment of laughter. In the fifth century Shiva shrine at Bhumara these dwarf *Pramatha Ganas* are shown in humorous poses. The Shukla Yajurveda in the tenth verse of its thirtieth book says that for entertainment a dwarf should be employed. Dramaturge while describing jester say that he should be dwarf *Waman.*

Hollowed masks with horns were found at many Indus sites (Fig. 17). Probably such masks were used by the dancers engaged in magico-religious rituals or providing amusement for an audience. Puppets with detachable limbs which can be manipulated by strings are also found in abundance. India is considered to be the original home of puppets because of these finds. People belonging to the Indus culture seem to be immensely fond of the theatrical arts including puppetry, dancing and mimicry. The possibility of Indus valley dancers enacting myths associated with the cult of a three-faced ithyphallic deity with a horned diadem, cannot be ruled out.

The engravings on the seals and amulets give us a clue to the variety of musical instruments developed by the people belonging to this urban culture. Dr S.R. Rao tells us about a 'stringed musical instrument with a "bridge" and a "twang" both made of shell found at Lothal.' An arched harp probably made of a wooden bracket and metal strings is seen on some of the seals. Drums of various kinds are also to be found. A terracotta figurine of a woman is found with a drum-like object under her arm. Castanets, clay whistles and cymbals were also popular musical instruments of the Indus people. Big assembly halls or *Sabhas* were found in the cities. Probably dance

and musical performances were given there to entertain the *Nagarakas* or the elite citizens of the town.

The existence of dancing figurines, musical instruments, masks and assembly halls indicate flourishing theatrical activity. Like the dancers painted on cave shelter walls, the Indus dancers too wear masks. But in addition to animal masks they wear human masks with horns. In both the primitive and early urban cultures the prevalence of ritualistic or magico-religious dances has been observed. Phallic dances were also probably performed in both the cultures. But in the absence of a literary record we are not in a position to ascertain which types of songs were sung or myths enacted by the dancers. The Indus script has not as yet yielded its secrets. Probably after its decipherment we may get some clue to the 'text' used by the performing artists.

The material, though very scanty, is quite significant and useful in reconstructing the very early history of the theatrical arts in India. Pieces fall into a neat pattern giving quite a clear picture of early theatre. Pre-Aryan folk, tribal and urban cultures had developed their own forms of dramatic, or to be more precise, semi-dramatic forms of entertainment. Festivals held in honour of their different deities like *Yakshas, Nagas* and fertility goddesses were full of dance, music and songs. Their rituals contained dance and music as their deities were pleased by the offerings of flowers, incense, wine, music and dancing. So profound was the influence of this tradition that even Vedic Aryans could not escape its impact.

In his book, *The Indian Theatre*, E.P. Horowitz, while discussing the origin of theatre, remarks:

> The oldest Indian dramas, or rather colloquies (Sanvadas) were not composed in Sanskrit, but in Prakrit. Indeed, originally the Prakrit Sanvadas were mysteries too, either Krishna or Shiva acting or dancing the principal part. Favourite episodes from Govinda's eventful life were the 'Slaying of Kansa' and 'The Binding of the Heaven Storming Titan'. Large crowds came to witness these open air spectacles. The grand finale, a merry roundelay of the bright eyed Gopis, proved a special attraction (Fig. 18). Rival worshippers flocked

> in equal number to the wanton bacchanals held in the honour of Shiva. Vedic dialogues reflect the afterglow rather than the first morning flush of the rude representation, staged in a vulgar tongue, of Krishna's and Shiva's ancient mysteries.

Even Bharata in his *Natyashastra* indirectly acknowledges the association of the theatrical arts with different ancient cults, pre-Vedic in their origin. In his chapter on *Purvaranga* he says that playing on musical instruments, singing and dancing appeases *Yakshas*, *Nagas*, *Guhyakas*, *Daityas*, *Danavas*, *Rakshasas*, *Lokapalas*, *Vighnavinayakas*, Rudra with his *Ganas* including *Bhutas*. Festivals known as *Mahas* or *Jatras*, full of theatrical entertainments, used to be hoisted in honour of these ancient deities. Later literature speaks of *Yakkha Maha* (Fig. 19), *Naga Maha*, *Nadi Maha*, *Mukunda* (*Krishna*) *Maha*, *Bhuta Jatra*, *Rudra Jatra*, *Giri Jatra*, where common people used to assemble to worship the deities and enjoy songs, dances and music.

Though this had a deep influence on Aryan culture and their mode of worship, one cannot, as some scholars suggested, say that Aryans simply borrowed the theatrical arts from the earlier habitants of this ancient land. They certainly had their own forms of dramatic entertainment and festivals in which these were performed. They had delightful community festivals like *Saman* in which men and women used to participate in gay abandon. Poetry recitation, archery and horse races were held and winners were honoured with suitable rewards. Beautiful courtesans used to visit the carnival to earn money by exhibiting their skill in dancing and singing while the bashful but alert eyes of young maidens searched for prospective grooms.

Various types of dances were in vogue among the Vedic Aryans. Bedecking herself with glittering ornaments, a lovely dancer displaying a seductive smile on her lips used to exhibit her charms to admiring crowds. There were community dances also. When dancers performed a cloud of dust rose from their dancing feet. Women also participated in these community dances. Shouting gleefully under the influence of exhilarating drinks, girls danced clinging to their male companions joyously. Their gods also danced. They firmly believed that mirth and dance prolongs the life span of man. Early Vedic

literature mentions a jester. *'Hasanam Upamantrinah'*, for laugh a jester, says a *Sukta.*

Vedic Samhitas not only mention dancing and playing on musical instruments, but also contain rudimentary dramatic texts known as *Akhyana* or *Samvada* hymns. These hymns in dramatic monologue and dialogue form were enacted at ritual sacrifices of the Vedic Aryans known as *Yajna.* In the Rig Veda, of the most ancient compilations of hymns ascribed to 1500 B.C., we find probably the earliest dramatic texts. Some of these monologues and dialogues are not even religious. They are based on a variety of themes social, mythical and secular. Some of them might have been picked up by the compilers of Rig Veda from the popular theatre of the time abounding in mirth and dance.

In a way we can say that the monologue is the earliest form of dramatic literature which later developed into a dialogue between two or more characters. In the Rig Veda we find highly dramatic monologues that remind us of the *Bhana* form dramatic literature of the Gupta period. *Bhana* is a one act play with a single character who delivers interesting monologue to amuse his audience. Speaking about *Bhana* Bharata says: 'The *Bhana* is to be acted by a single character and it is of two kinds: that (with one's) recounting of one's own feelings, and that (with) describing someone else's acts.' It is interesting to note that Bharata says that he is describing the characteristics of *Bhana* according to the Vedic tradition, *Tathagamanugatam.* He seems to have been aware of the practice of enacting monologues included in the Rig Veda.

One of the most interesting Rig Vedic monologues is that of Indra, the mighty Vedic deity of clouds, thunder and rain (Fig. 20). He is also described as a great dancer: 'Nrtu'. The *Suktas* say: 'Indra represents in his dances his heroic activities' and 'he dances according to the tune of *Anustubh* metre.' He is extremely fond of the intoxicating juice of Soma plant. Drunk to his heart's content, boastful of his might, Indra delivers a soliloquy. The oft repeated burden of his talk is: 'for I have often drunk of the Soma.' Speaks the deity:

Thus, indeed, thus my mind (resolved): 'I will give cows and

horses (to my worshippers)', for I have often drunk of the Soma.

Like the winds violently shaking (the trees), the draughts (of Soma) have lifted me up, for I have often drunk of the Soma.

The draughts (of Soma) have lifted me up like swift horses (drawing) a chariot, for I have often drunk of the Soma.

The praise (of the pious) has come to me like a lowing cow to her beloved calf, for I have often drunk of the Soma.

I revolve the song of praise in my heart as a carpenter (making) a charioteer's seat, for I have often drunk of the Soma.

The five castes have not eluded the glance of my eye, for I have often drunk of the Soma.

Both heaven and earth (are) not equal to one half of me, for I have often drunk of the Soma.

I excel the sky in greatness, (I excel) this great earth, for I have often drunk of the Soma.

Lo! I will place this earth (where I will), either here or there, for I have often drunk of the Soma.

I will drive the scorching (sun) either here or there, for I have of.en drunk of the Soma.

One of my wings is in the sky, the other I dragged below, for I have often drunk of the Soma.

I am (the Sun), the greatest of the great, raised to the firmament, for I have often drunk of the Soma.

Receiving the offering I go. graced (by the worshippers), bearing the oblation to the gods, for I have often drunk of the Soma.

R.V. (X.10.7)

We can visualize an actor or a priest standing near the sacrificial altar delivering a grandiloquent speech in the guise of Indra with suitable gestures and dance movements. It seems that in the end he used to receive offerings from his appreciative audience as a reward of his performance.

In another monologue a repentant gambler gives vent to his feelings. This beautiful dramatic speech seems to have come from popular folk theatre. Purely secular in its content it seems to be unrelated to any deity. A person ruined by the dice who still cannot resist his temptation of the game is very well portrayed in the monologue. Speaking about *Bhana*, Bharata says that this one act play should be acted by a *Dhurta*, a knave. The gambler belongs to this category. In this beautiful *Sukta* entitled *Aksha Kitay Ninda*, the gambler says:

> The large rattling dice exhilarate me as torrents borne on a precipice flowing in the desert; the exciting dice animate me as the taste of the Soma of Mujavat (delights of the gods).
>
> This (my wife) has not been angry (with me), nor was overcome with shame; kind was she to me and to my friends; yet for the sake of one or other die, I have deserted this affectionate spouse.
>
> My mother-in-law reviles me, my wife opposes me; the beggars meet no compassionate (benefactor); I do not realise the enjoyment of the gamester any more than that of a valuable horse grown old.
>
> Others touch the wife of him whose wealth the potent dice covet; his mother, father, brothers say, 'We know him not, take him away bound (wherever you will).'
>
> When I reflect, (then I say), 'I will play no more with them.' I pay attention to my friends who desert me; and the tawny dice rattle as they are thrown; I will hasten to their accustomed place as a harlot (to an assignation).

The gamester goes to the gaming table, radiant in person and asking himself, 'Shall I win?' The dice increase his passion for play as he practises the arts of (gambling) with his adversary.

Dice verily are armed with hooks, with goads, pricking, paining and torturing (the gamester); to the winning (player) they are the givers of sons, they are tipped with honey; slaying him in return by taking away the gambler's (all).

The aggregate fifty-three of them are played as the divine truth, observant Sun (travels): the dice bow not before the wrath of any, however violent; a king himself pays them homage.

Now they abide below; now they palpitate on high; handless, they overpower him who has hands; cast upon the dice-board like coals from the sky, even though cold they burn the heart.

The deserted wife of the gamester is afflicted; the mother (grieves) for the son wandering wherever he likes; involved in debt, ever in fear, anxious for wealth, (the gambler) goes forth by night to the dwellings of others (to plunder).

The gamester having observed the happy wife and well-ordered home of others, suffers regret; yet in the forenoon he puts to the tawny steeds, and at night the sinner lies down by the fire.

Dice, I offer salutation to him who has been the general of your great army, the chief lord of your host; I do not provide him with wealth; I raise my ten (fingers) to the east; that (which) I speak (is) the truth.

Giving serious attention (to my advice), play not with dice; pursue agriculture; delight in wealth (so acquired); there gamblers are cows; there is a wife; so has this (visible) sovereign Savitri declared to me.

Be friends with us (dice); bestow upon us happiness; approach us not in terrible wrath; let your anger light upon our enemies; let our enemy fall under the bondage of the tawny (dice).

R.V. (X.3.5)

Non-ritualistic in nature, realistic in its purport, this Rig Vedic hymn in monologue form is extremely dramatic. It looks as if this action packed piece has been taken out straight from the performer's script-book. The game of dice is as old as the Indus culture and gamblers are termed in the Yajur Veda as *Sabhasthanu*, pillars of the gambling den. The dramatic monologue of the Rig Vedic performer must have been well received by the spectators as a humorous but scathing comment on the widespread vice. There are few more such monologues in the Rig Veda which are as dramatic and full of social content.

The dialogue is a natural evolution of the monologue. The number of actors increases from one to two and subsquently to more than two. We find clear traces of this evolution in the Rig Veda. Like monologues there are dramaticd ialogues, unrelated with any ritual and many times full of social content. One such dialogue hymn discusses the brother-sister relationship in the changing context of Vedic society. Preserver of social morality Yama resists the amorous advances of his twin sister Yami. Thus runs the intimate dialogue:

Yami : I invite you, Yama, my bosom friend, to intimate friendship. May Prajapati bestow an offspring for the sake of thee becoming the father of a son to be born to us.

Yama : Thy friend longs not for a friendship in which a kinswoman is treated as one of a different family. The hero sons of the great Asura (are) upholders of heaven, they can see from afar.

Yami : The immortals take pleasure in (a union) like this which is forbidden to every mortal. Let thy mind

then concur with mine, and as the progenitor (of all) was the husband (of his daughter - Saraswati), do thou enjoy my person.

Yama : We have not done what was done formerly; for how can we who speak truth, utter now that which is untrue? Gandharva (the sun) was in the watery (firmament), and the water was his bride. She is our common parent, hence, our near affinity.

Yami : The divine omniform generator Twashtri, the progenitor, made us two husband and wife, even in the womb; none frustrate his undertaking; earth and heaven are conscious of our (union).

Yama : Who knows anything of this (his) first day (of existence)? who has beheld it? who has ever revealed it? The dwelling of Mitra and of Varuna is vast. What sayest thou, who punishest men with hell?

Yami : The desire of Yama hath approached me, Yami, to lie with me in the same bed; I will abandon my person as a wife to her husband; let us exert ourselves in union like the two wheels of a chariot.

Yama : The spies of the Gods, which wander upon earth, never stop, never close their eyes. Associate quickly, destructress, with some other than with me, and exert yourself in union, like two wheels of a chariot.

Yami : To him (Yama) let every worshipper sacrifice both day and night, on him let the eye of the sun repeatedly rise; (for him may) the kindred pair (day and night) unite with heaven and earth. Yami bears patiently Yama's unbrotherly (refusal).

Yama : The subsequent ages will come when sisters will choose one who is not a brother (as a husband);

therefore, auspicious one, choose another husband than me, make thine arm a pillow for thy mate.

Yami : Is he a brother whose sister has no Lord? Is she a sister (whose brother) misfortune approaches? Overcome by desire, I strongly urge this one request: unite thy person with mine.

Yama : I will not unite my person with thine; they call him who approaches a sister a sinner. Enjoy pleasure with some other than me; thy brother, auspicious one, has no such desire.

Yami : Alas, Yama, thou art feeble; we understand not thy mind or thy heart. Some other female embraces thee as girth a horse or as a creeper a tree.

Yama : Do thou, Yami, embrace another; and let another embrace thee as a creeper a tree: seek his affection, let him seek thine and make a happy union.

R.V. (X.1.10)

Even though mythology declares Yama as a deity of death and gives him divine status, the social content of the dialogue is quite significant in the context of changing morality. It depicts a crisis in the family of Vivasvat to which they both belong. Pleadings and persuasions of Yami and the reasoning of Yama are very well portrayed in the playlet.

Another interesting dramatic dialogue in the tenth Mandala of the Rig Veda depicts the first known love story between an *Apsara* and a King. Contrary to the tradition of Sanskrit court poetry and drama, this crisp dialogue between a heart-broken lover and his beautiful but obstinate beloved, has an unconventional tragic end. Urvashi, the heroine of the playlet, completely differs from the insipid, mellow, lotus soft, romantic beauties that we meet in classical Sanskrit theatre. In fact she differs radically from her own portrayal in later literature. For instance, Kalidasa's play on the same theme presents her as a timid, lovelorn damsel surrendering totally to her lover. Kalidasa deprives her of her pride, courage and free-will which she displays in

the Rig Vedic hymn. The Rig Vedic Urvashi seems to be a free person belonging to the matriarchal phase of social evolution. She speaks with her ex-lover Pururavas with unique frankness and refuses to yield to his pleadings. Thus runs this interesting dialogue:

Pururavas : Ho indignant wife, with mind (relenting), stay a while, let us now interchange discourse. These, our secret thoughts, whilst unspoken, did not yield us happiness even at the last day.

Urvashi : What can we accomplish through such discourse? I have passed away from thee like the first of the dawns. Return, Pururavas, to thy dwelling. I am as hard to catch as the wind.

Pururavas : The arrow is not to be cast from the quiver for glory. I am no longer the impetuous despoiler of cattle (of the enemy), nor their hundredfold (riches). My prowess having lost its strength, (my might) no longer flashes forth; (my warriors) the terrifiers (of the foe) hear not my shout in battle.

Urvashi : If, Ushas, this Urvashi, offering food and wealth to her father-in-law, loves (her husband), she has repaired from the neighbouring house to her husband's home, where she loved (her lord), being delighted night and day by his embrace.

Thrice a day, Pururavas, hast thou embraced me, thou hast loved me without a rival; I have followed thee to thy dwelling, thou, hero, hast been the sovereign of my person.

Pururavas : Sujurni, Shreni, Sumna-api, Hradechakshus, Granthini, and the swift moving (Urvashi who arrived) they, decorated and purple-tinted, did not go first, they lowed like milch-kine for protection.

Urvashi : As soon as he was born the wives (of the gods) surrounded him, the spontaneously flowing rivers nourished him, for the gods reared thee, Pururavas, for the mighty conflict, for the slaughter of the Dasyus.

Pururavas : When, becoming their companion, (Pururavas) the mortal associated with these immortal (nymphs) who had abandoned their bodies, they fled from me like a timid doe, like horses harnessed to a chariot.

When a mortal mixing with these immortal nymphs has converse with them with words and actions, they becoming ducks do not show their bodies, like playful horses champing (the bit).

(Urvashi) who shone like flashing lightning, bringing me the desirable dews (of heaven, has appeared); a son able in act and friendly to man has been born; (Urvashi) has prolonged my lengthened existence.

Urvashi : Thou hast been born thus to protect the earth; thou hast deposited this vigour in me; knowing (the future) I have instructed thee (what to do) every day; thou hast not listened to me; why dost thou now address me, neglectful (of my instructions)?

Pururavas : When shall a son (born of thee) claim me as a father, and, crying, shed a tear on recognizing (me)? What son shall sever husband and wife who are of one mind, now that the fire shines upon your husband's parents?

Urvashi : Let me reply. (Thy son) will shed tears, crying out and calling aloud when the expected auspicious time arrives; I will send thee that (child) which is

thine in me, depart to thy house, thou canst not, simpleton, detain me.

Pururavas : (Thy husband) who sports with thee may not depart, never to return, (depart) to proceed to a distant region. Either let him sleep upon the lap of *Nirriti* or let the swift-moving wolves devour him.

Urvashi : Die not, Pururavas, fall not; let not hideous wolves devour thee. Female friendship does not exist, their hearts are the hearts of jackals.

When changed in form I wandered amongst the mortals, I dwelt (with them) for four delightful years. I ate once a day a small quantity of butter; satisfied with that now I depart.

Pururavas : I, Vashistha, giver of dwellings, bring under subjugation Urvashi who fills the firmament (with lustre) and measures out a rain. May (Pururavas), bestower of auspicious rites, abide near thee; come back—my heart is burning.

Urvashi : These gods said to thee, O son of Ila, since thou art indeed subject to death, let thy progeny propitiate thy gods with oblations, thou shalt rejoice (with me) in heaven.

R.V. (X.8.5)

The *Satapatha Brahmana* provides the missing links of the Pururavas-Urvashi myth which is obscure at places in the Rig Veda. After performing certain rites, Pururavas is transformed into a *Gandharva* and unites with Urvashi (Fig. 21). Because of this ritualistic association of the playlet we may, in a way, term it as a ritualistic play. The myth is devised to explain the ritual. That is how from ritual myth evolves, and its enactment turns it into theatre. Symbolic gestures used in the ritual are borrowed freely while enacting the myth

associated with it. Hence the word *Mudra* is used in ritualistic literature and in drama with similar connotation.

We find dialogues with more than two characters also. Prominent among them is an interesting dialogue that takes place among Indra, his lovely wife Indrani and Vrishakapi. In the Sarama-Panis dialogue hymn, all Panis in the style of the Greek chorus speak in unison with Sarama, a messenger of Indra. Thus runs the dialogue:

The Panis : With what intention has Sarama come to this place? Verily the way is long and difficult to traverse by the perserving. What is the motive of thy coming to us? What sort of wandering was thine? How hast thou crossed the waters of the Rasa?

Sarama : I come, the appointed messenger of Indra, desiring, Panis, your great hidden treasures; through fear of being crossed the (water) helped us, thus I passed over the waters of the Rasa.

The Panis : What is Indra like, O Sarama? What is the appearance of him as whose messenger you have come to this place from afar? (Then they say to one another) Let her approach, let us make friends with her, and let her be the lord of our cattle.

Sarama : I do not believe that he can be subdued; he as whose messenger I have come to this place from afar subdues (his enemies). The deep rivers do not conceal him; you, Panis, slain by Indra, will sleep (in death).

The Panis : These are the cows which thou, aupicious Sarama, coming to the extremities of the sky, demandest. Who will give them up to thee without a combat? And our weapons are sharp.

Sarama : Your words, Panis, are not in the place of armies;

your sinful bodies will not be equal to arrows. Let your path be difficult to follow, let Brihaspati show no favour to either (your words or your persons).

The Panis : This treasure, Sarama, secured in the mountain is composed of cows, horses and riches: the Panis protect it who are good watchers; thou hast come to this lonely spot in vain.

Sarama : Excited by the Soma, the Rishis, the *Angirasas* of nine months' rite, headed by Ayasya, will come hither: they will partition this herd of cattle, then the Panis will retract their words.

The Panis : Thou hast indeed come hither, Sarama, constrained by the divine powers; we will make thee our sister, do not return, we will share the cattle with thee, auspicious one.

Sarama : I recognize not fraternity nor sisterhood; Indra and the terrible Angirasas know (my kindred); my (masters) desiring cattle overshadowed (your habitation) when I came; depart hence, Panis to a distant spot.

Go hence, Panis, to a far off distant (spot), let the cattle come forth in due order, bursting through (the door) the concealed cattle which Brihaspati, the Soma, the grindling stones and wise Rishis have found.

R.V. (X.9.9)

Sarama, an envoy of Indra in search of the stolen cows of Brihaspati, finds them in the possession of the Panis. They try to befriend her, but, she being loyal to her master, asks the Panis to release the cattle or face the wrath of mighty Indra. The clever envoy tries to achieve the objectives of her masters through negotiations using all

techniques of statecraft. This reminds us of Krishna's negotiations with the Kauravas on behalf of the Pandavas.

About the dialogue hymns of the Rig Veda there are many theories, but we need not enter into their complications. It is sufficient for our purpose to know that myths or episodes were available in the form of dramatic dialogue to the performing artists of the Rig Vedic times.

In the hymn that is in the form of a dialogue between Indra, Indrani and Vrishakapi, beautiful Indrani is seen complaining to Indra about the annoying pranks of his pet ape Vrishakapi. He in turn tries to pacify his angry and proud consort by sweet words of flattery. It is a very interesting family drama. In Kalidasa's play *Malavikagnimitram*, we find the mention of a monkey named Pingal who frightens princess Vasulakshmi. There is a very beautiful sculpture at the Kandaria Mahadev temple of Khajuraho in which a girl frightened by the pet monkey of her lover is seen embracing him. The smiling lover, delighted by the embrace of his beloved, is seen holding the monkey at bay with a stick in his hand. Though one cannot say with certainty that the scene sculpted on the outer wall of the temple was inspired by the Rig Vedic Vrishakapi hymn, it does remind us of the dialogue which runs as follows:

Indra : They have neglected the pressing of the Soma, they have not praised the divine Indra at the cherished (sacrifices), at which noble Vrishakapi becoming my friend rejoiced.

Indrani : Thou, Indra, much annoyed, hastenest towards Vrishakapi; and yet thou findest no other place to drink the Soma.

What (favour) has this tawny deer Vrishakapi done to thee that thou shouldst like liberal (benefactor) bestow upon him wealth and nourishment.

This Vrishakapi whom thou, Indra, cherished as thy dear (son)—may the dog which chases the boar (seize) him by the ear (and) devour him.

The ape has spoiled the beloved *ghi*-adorned (oblations) made to me (by worshippers); let me quickly cut off his head, let me not be the giver of happiness to one who works evil.

There is no woman more amiable than I am, nor one who bears fairer sons than I, nor thou, more tractable, nor one more ardent.

Vrishakapi : O mother, who art easy of access, it will quickly be as (thou hast said); may my (father) and thou, mother, be united; may it delight my (father) and thy head like a bird.

Indra : Thou, who hast beautiful arms, who hast beautiful fingers, long-haired, broad-hipped, why art thou angry with our Vrishakapi; O thou, wife of a hero!

Indrani : This savage beast despises me as one who has no male (protector), and yet I am the mother of male offspring, the wife of Indra, friend of the Maruts.

The mother who is the institutress of ceremony, the mother of male offspring, the wife of Indra, goes first to the united sacrifice to battle (and) is honoured (by the praisers).

Indra : I have heard that Indrani is the most fortunate amongst the women, for her lord Indra who is above all (the world) does not die of old age like other (men).

I am not happy, Indrani, without my friend Vrishakapi; whose acceptable oblation here, purified with water, proceeds to the gods.

Vrishakapi : O mother of Vrishakapi, wealthy, possessing

excellent sons, possessing excellent daughters-in-law, let Indra eat thy bull, (give him) the beloved and most delightful *ghi.*

Indra : The worshippers dress for me fifteen (and) twenty bulls; I eat them and (become) fat, they fill both sides of my belly.

Indrani : Like a sharp-horned bull roaring amongst the herds, so may thy libation please thy heart, Indra, (thy libation) which she who desires to please thee is expressing for thee.

The man who is important begets no progeny but he who is endowed with vigour.

Indra : He who is endowed with vigour begets not progeny but he who is impotent.

Indrani : Let this Vrishakapi, Indra, take a dead wild ass, (let him take) a knife (to cut it up), a fire place (to cook it), a new saucepan, and a cart full of fuel.

Indra : Here I came to the (sacrifice) looking upon (the worshippers), distinguishing the *Dasa* and *Arya*; I drink (the Soma) of (the worshipper), who effuses (the Soma) with mature (mind); I look upon the intelligent (sacrificer).

Go home, Vrishakapi, to the halls of sacrifice, (from the lurking place of the enemy), which is desert and forest (how many leagues are they from there?) and from the nearest (lurking place).

Come back, Vrishakapi, that we may do what is agreeable to thee; thou, who art the destroyer of the sleep, comest home again by road.

Rise up and come home, Vrishakapi and

> Indra, where is that destructive beast, to what (region) has (that beast), the exhilarator of men, gone?
>
> R.V. (X.7.2)
> (Trans: H.H. Wilson)

This and similar other hymns in monologue and dialogue form constitute some of the earliest known dramatic texts. Some scholars, however, believe that the Pyramid Texts of Egypt with 'occasional dialogue and indications of action' which are ascribed to *c.* 2750 to 2475 B.C. are the earliest known ritualistic plays. These were enacted by the priests periodically 'to ensure the well-being of the dead Pharaoh.' However there is no concrete evidence to support this contention. But we know for certain that *yajna* ceremonies in india included theatrical performances. Actors, singers, and dancers used to flock the *yajna Mandapa*, pavilion erected to perform fire sacrifice.

One of the most important festivals of ancient India associated with dramatic entertainments is the *Indra Maha* which in Prakrit literature is referred to as *Inda Maha.* Bharata says that the banner festival of Indra, *Dhwajmaha Sriman Mahendrasya,* is the most suitable occasion for staging the play. Indra's flag-staff was worshipped to save the performance from any kind of obstacles. The following prayer used to be offered on the occasion:

> Thou art Indra's weapon killing all the demons; thou hast been fashioned by all the gods, and thou art capable of destroying all the obstacles; bring victory to the king and defeat to the enemies, welfare to cows and Brahmins success to dramatic undertakings.

It used to be decorated with white, blue, yellow, red and multicoloured cloths from top to bottom in that order. Garlands, incense and unguents were offered to the decorated bamboo pole which represented Indra's flag-staff. This ritual was considered to be essential before the commencement of the play proper. Indra was the deity who was supposed to protect the hero of the play from all sorts of obstacles.

There is a very interesting reference to a similar festival in the Rig

Veda itself. The image of the great dancer, as Indra is described in the Rig Veda, used to be worshipped on festive occasions according to a hymn in the fourth Mandala of the Rig Veda. Another hymn says: *brahmanas tva satakrata udvamsham iva yemire*—O Indra, worshippers while singing songs held thee aloft as it were on a pole (1.10.1). In course of time, the bamboo pole might have been erected with the image of Indra on it.

Silappadikaram also refers to the dramatic festival held in honour of Indra and his son Jayanta in the southern countries. In the fifth chapter of the epic it is said that the festival was full of singing, dancing and music. It hummed with the 'melodies produced by the flute, the drum, the stringed musical instrument called *yal* and singing of songs by a class of minstrels and music masters known as *panar*.' The most interesting account of worshipping the flag staff representing the son of Indra and planting it on the stage is given in the third canto of the epic.

> On the day (of the dramatic performance) on which this staff (representing Jayanta, son of Indra) was to be used, the dancing girl had to bathe it with holy waters, brought in a golden pitcher, and afterwards garland it. Then it was handed over with a blessing to the state elephant already adorned with a plate of gold and other ornaments on its forehead. To the accompaniment of the drum proclaiming victory, and other musical instruments, the king and his five groups of advisers circumambulated the chariot and the elephant and gave the pole to the musician poet on top of the chariot. Then they went round the town in a procession, and entering the theatre they placed the pole in its appointed position.

This confirms the tradition mentioned by Bharata in his *Natyashastra*. According to him the theatre originated in the festival held in honour of Indra in which he was worshipped by his devotees in the form of a decorated pole probably with his image on its top. A similar festival used to be held in ancient Greece in honour of Dionysus. Athenian women devotees of Dionysus used to celebrate this festival in the month of January. It was known as the Lenaia. A long pole with the mask of Dionysus hoisted on it used to be carried

in a procession by masked devotees and actors to the amphitheatre where it was planted facing the orchestra, the performing arena. Plays used to be enacted as an offering to him. Similar practices still linger in many parts of India. In Goa the idol of the temple deity is taken out in a procession led by a band of musicians, singers and dancers and then installed in the balcony of the *sabha mandapa*, the assembly hall of the temple. Then the actors present plays connected with the ten incarnations of Lord Vishnu which is known as the *Dashavatar* as a votive offering to the deity. The primitive man used to dance before the deities with the same intention. The ritualistic plays were votive offerings to the deities in the primitive community.

The Evolution

It is very clear from Vedic and later Sanskrit literature that theatrical arts were very much associated with *yajnas* as a part of the ritual and as a means of entertainment of the people assembled. *Shailusha*, the actor, was one of the sacrificial items of the *Purushamedha Yajna* according to the *Yajur Veda*. Dr. Hazara has also pointed out that according to *Vajaseniya Samhita* and *Taittiriya Brahmana*, a jester is to be sacrificed to the deity of laughter. The things were sacrificed or put into sacrificial fire so that they should reach the deities. Were actors and jesters too sacrificed so that they may on reaching heaven entertain the deities? Has not Bharata said that it is by the theatrical performances that the gods are pleased most?

The *Mahabharata* mentions that Brahmins assembled to perform the *Rajasuya Yajna* were entertained by actors and dancers. The *Harivamsha*, the *Khilaparva* of *Mahabharata*, states that on the occasion of the *Rajasuya Yajna* of Vasudeva, actor named Bhadra pleased the priests assembled to conduct the sacrifice by his excellent performance. He is described as *Lokaviro Mahanata*, a hero among the people, greatest among the actors. He requests the Rishis to bless him that in whosoever's guise—dead, living or to be born in the future—he may appear on the stage he should look just like him. Further, it is said that Bhadra performed a play based on the *Ramayana* theme and also participated in the performance of the play *Rambhabhisar* enacted by the Yadavas in the capital of the Asura Vajranabha. He might have performed similar plays on the occasion of the *Rajasuya*

Yajna. In his book *Nataraj*, C. Shivaramamurthi writes:

> Dance is not only a pleasurable ocular sacrifice but also a popular happy adjunct to the regular sacrifice itself. Dance and music, particularly the chant of *Sama* hymns to the tune of *Vina*, was an essential factor of *yagas.*
>
> One of the most graphic representations of the Trivikrama's triumph over Bali on a Gupta architrave from Pavaya, now in Gwalior Museum, illustrates this very clearly in an elaborate series of panels depicting various facets of Bali's *yaga* with horse stationed near *yupa* post, the princes watching from near the *yajnavata*, the *ritwik* priests assembled, the musical orchestra as an accompaniment to dance.
>
> The variation of the shape of *vina* is also shown there, the guitar like *kacchapi* and bow shaped *saptatantri.* The threefold drum is also there, *tripuskara* as it is called, and the dancer's movement is a delicate stance of *angahara.* The famous dance scene itself is a part of celebration of Bali's *yaga* (Fig. 22).

The panel ascribed to fifth century A.D. is eloquent testimony of the association of the theatrical arts with the *yajna* celebrations. Bharata clearly states in the *Natyashastra*: 'Stories taken out of Vedic lore (for enactment) is called drama.' Probably he was aware of the tradition of enacting at *Yajna* festivals dialogue hymns depicting different myths or episodes.

Vedic literature mentions different types of performers including *shailusha* (actor), *upamantrin* (court jester), *kari* (buffoons), *suta* (singer), *nrtu* (dancer) and *talava* (hand clapper). Musical instruments like flute, lute, drums and conch were in vogue. Different types of dances are also mentioned. Sama Veda mentions a developed system of music. Myth in dramatic dialogue form which we may call rudimentary playlets are seen in the Rig Veda. Hence Bharata while discussing the origin of theatre traces the *pathya* portion of the art to Rig Veda. Scholars like L. von Schroeder believe, "the word *Chandas* (metre) originally means dance-song and Vedic metres *Trishtubh*,

Anushtubh, *Jagati* and *Gayatri* can be explained at best as modes of dancing." In the Vedic period we find music, dance and songs in dialogue form coming together forming a nucleus of early theatre. A very important landmark was reached around 1500 B.C. in the history of the evolution of Indian theatre.

Pre-Vedic local theatrical traditions must have helped the evolution of theatre by its active participation in the process. As the ancient local deities like *Yakshas* and Shiva were respectfully accepted by the Vedic pantheon, their modes of worship which included dancing, singing, playing on musical instruments not only found its way into Aryan rituals but completely revolutionalized it. The impact was so profound that the importance of sacrificial rituals started declining fast, giving way to the more influential cult of *Bhakti*. With this the importance of the theatrical arts grew to such proportions that their performance was considered to be more pleasing to the deities than other modes of worship including meditation, Yogic practices and rituals like sacrifices. Bharata accepted this premise. Dramatic performance had reached the status of *yajna* itself. The great Indian dramatist Kalidasa describes it as 'ocular sacrifice most pleasing to the Gods'. In his play *Malavikagnimitram*, dance teacher Ganadas calls dramatic performance *Krătum Chakshusham*. The *Agni Purana* says: The king or any person who will make offerings of paintings, singing, playing on musical instruments and dramatic performances, *preksha*, will reach heaven after death (*devam divam varjet*).

The association of theatrical arts with religion has been there since the ancient magico-religious rituals of primitive man. This is a universal phenomenon. But in India this association was especially fruitful. The magnificent mediaeval temples of India invariably had *natya mandapas* (dancing halls) attached to them for the performance of dance and drama. It is quite clear from the Sitabengra cave inscription that the practice of dedicating dancing girls to the temples dates back to the third and second century B.C. The major classical and traditional dance and dance-drama styles of India are a direct outcome of this association which still continues to exist.

Till now we have surveyed the evolution of the theatrical arts from the Mesolithic period. After studying cave paintings depicting dancing

scenes we have observed the condition of theatrical arts under the Indus civilization. In the Vedic period we came across dialogue hymns that were enacted at the time of the *yajna* ceremonies. The material at our command for reconstructing the pre-historic past of Indian theatre history is meagre, yet enough to allow us to draw certain inferences. By the time we come to the Vedic period it seems that actors, dancers, musicians and jesters had really become professionals, that is, along with their role in the magico-religious rituals they had become entertainers also. Gradually they were dissociated from rituals. However we still find vestiges of the ancient tradition in which dance forms the part of ritual (Fig. 12). In primitive societies dances were performed as 'sympathetic magic', a means to influence future course of action. Magico-religious hunting dances were performed to ensure success in hunting expeditions. This concept still exists. For instance, in Kerala the *Avataram* portion of the famous dance-drama *Krishnan Attam* (Fig. 23) is offered to the deity of the Guruvayur temple by devotees in the hope of begetting a son. *Avataram* relates the story of Krishna's birth. Devotees believe that by making this play their offering, they will get sons like Krishna. The play *Swayamvaram* relates the story of Krishna's marriage with the beautiful Vidarbha princess Rukmini. Unmarried girls or their parents offer this play to Guruvayurappa so that they are blessed with husbands or sons-in-law like Krishna. Behind these offerings lurks the ancient concept of sympathetic magic performed to give a favourable turn to the course of events.

We find many types of professional entertainers mentioned frequently in the ancient Indian epics like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* as well as early Buddhist literature. The most significant reference to a regular play or *nataka* is found in the *Ramayana*. In the *Ayodhya Kanda*, we find friends of prince Bharata arranging the performance of humorous plays for his entertainment. The capital of mighty Iksvaku kings – *Ayodhya* – had a regular theatre hall or *natakashala* for the performance of plays. But no play of the time has survived, nor have we any definite idea of the type of theatres that were available.

However the existence of dramatic literature at the time cannot be ruled out. In the Buddhist *Jataka* stories which belong to *c.* 600 B.C. or even earlier, the word *nataka* in the sense of drama is mentioned.

In the *Udaya Jataka* occurs the following passage:

> *Raja puttam rajje abhisinchitva natakanissa paccupatthapessamiti sasanam pesesi*—The king who desired to make his son king with solemn sprinkling and to arrange plays for his pleasure gave command accordingly.

The prince in the *Suruchi Jataka* is said to have witnessed divine plays: *Tassa hi dibbanatakanam ditthatta.*

Jataka tales give significant information about various theatrical arts of the time. The long list of entertainers mentioned in the *Vidhurapandita Jataka* includes *nata* (actor), *nartaka* (dancer), *gayaka* (singer), *panissar* (hand-clapper), *kumbhathunikam* (one who plays on earthen drums), *langhataka* (one skilled in jumping), *malla* (wrestler), *mayakara* (magician), *sobhiya* or *sobhanika* (a kind of actor, probably one who plays at cave theatres), *mutthika* (boxer) and *vaitalika* (bard). The professional entertainers and their troupes used to visit *gram* (village), *Nigama* (city) and even the *rajadhani* (capital) to present dramatic performances (Fig. 24).

The word *pathya* clearly refers to plays which were full of songs of various kinds. *Samajja* is a dramatic performance which is performed on a circular stage or arena known as *samajja-mandal.* The term *ranga,* denoting some kind of theatrical structure, occurs in the *Jatakas.* The open-air temporary theatres were erected around a circular dance floor by fixing wooden planks, tier above tier, like a scaffolding. *Chakkatichakke manchatimanche bandhimsu* says *Mahapanad Jataka.* Bharata calls this type of arrangements of seats *Sopanakruti Pathkam,* and recommends that wood or brick may be used as construction material.

Probably the earliest description of some kind of theatrical structure occurs in the *Jataka* tales. Sometimes, as described in the *Guttila Jataka, mandap* or pavilions used to be raised for theatrical performances. People contributed money.on the occasion of festivals to pay the performing artists, famous in their field, who were invited to give performances. Kautilya in his *Arthashastra* states clearly: 'One who does not contribute his share to arrange a stage show shall not witness

it with his people. If he listens or witnesses it secretly, he shall perforce give the double share.' Names of popular performers also occur in the *Jatakas*. Musil and Guttil were famous *veena* players, well versed in the art of music. Bhandukarana and Pandukarana were famous *mayakaras* or magicians. The most beautiful and skilled dancer of the period was Janapadkalyani to whose programme people used to flock in large numbers and shout their appreciation by saying: *Sadhu! Sadhu!* Kings used to maintain their own troupes of actors, dancers and musicians. Competitions between performing artists were held and the winner was suitably rewarded. Performers used to visit fairs and festivals to earn money by exhibiting their skill.

There is explicit mention of stories being enacted which indicates the existence of some kind of dramatic text either written or improvised. In the *Labha Garaha Jataka*, Bodhisatva born as a wise *acharya* speaks sarcastically of 'actor's tricks' who 'ill tales doth tell' to earn money. We can infer from the story of Chulani Brahmadatta's beautiful daughter Panchal Chandi that poets were requested to write songs on a particular theme or episode for a handsome payment and these were enacted by the actors in the *Samajja* festiva :: Operatic plays were in great demand among the troupes of professional performers. However, none of the plays mentioned in the *Maha Ummagga Jataka* have survived.

The *Jataka* tales give a very clear picture of flourishing theatrical activity in *c.* 600 B.C. There were theatre halls, companies of professional performing artists and enthusiastic spectators. Kings, rich merchants, and village chiefs extended patronage to various kinds of performing artists.

Buddhist literature gives concrete evidence of the theatrical activities of the period. In *Diggha Nikaya*, Buddha says: 'Gotama the recluse refrains from being a spectator at shows at fairs, with *nauch* dances, singing and music.' He further expresses his regret saying: 'whereas some recluses and Brahmanas, while living on the food provided by the faithful, continue to be addicted to visiting shows.' A long list of different kinds of shows is given in the *Nikaya* which includes:

Nakkam : Nauch dances
Gitam : Singing of songs
Vaditam : Instrumental music
Pekkham : Dramatic shows
Akkhanam : Ballad or story recitation
Panissaram : Hand music
Vetalam : Chanting of bards
Kumbhathunam : Playing on earthen drum
Sobhanagarakam : Fairy scenes
Kandala-vamsha-dhopanam : Acrobatic feats by *Kandalas*

Entertainments like combats of elephants, horses, buffaloes, goats, rams, cocks and quails, likewise boxing and wrestling bouts were available at fairs and festivals. Despite stern admonition by the master, some monks did stray into the forbidden land of theatrical entertainments. *Chullavagga* relates:

> Now at a time there was a festival on the mountain top (*giragga samagga*) at Rajagaha and *bhikkus* went to see it.
> The people murmured, were annoyed and became indignant saying: 'How can the *sakhyaputtiya samanas* (Buddhist monks) go to see dancing, singing and music (*naccham pi vaditam pi gitam pi*) like those who are still enjoying the pleasure of the world?

Probably it became difficult for the monks to resist the temptation of attending the *Samajja*. According to *Vinaya* texts two 'wicked and shameless' monks, Assagi and Punabhasu, were expelled from the order along with their followers as 'they used to dance and sing and play music'.

Wijesekera, while discussing the Buddhist evidence for the early existence of drama, points to a significant passage in the *Gamani Samyutta* which runs thus:

> *Ekamantam nisinno kho Talaputo Natagamani Bhagavatam etad avoca: Sutam me tam bhante pubbakanam acariyapacariyanam natanam bhasamamananam—Yo so nato rangammajjhe samajjamajje saccalikena janam haseti rameti so kayassa bheda parm*

> *marana pahasanam devanam sahavyatam upapajjatiri. Idha Bhagava kim ahati.*
>
> Then the Talaputa, the chief of the village of dancers, came to the Exalted One, saluted him and sat down at one side. So seated Talaputa said to the Exalted One: "I have heard, Lord, traditional teachers of old, who were actors, speaking (in this wise): 'A player who on a stage or in the arena makes people laugh (Fig. 25) and delights, them with truth and falsehood, on dissolution of body after death, is reborn in the company of laughing Devas.' What does the Exalted One say in this matter?"

The passage refers to the tradition of staging comedies or farces which the *Ramayana* also supports. The Buddhist work *Avadanshataka* mentions a performance of a *Buddha Nataka* play based on the life of Buddha, at the command of the king of Shobhavati. A *natacharya* (dance-master) of Dakshinapatha once arrived with his troupe of actors at Shobhavati, a capital city. He performed a play in which he himself appeared as Buddha and the other actors as monks – *Tatra natacharyah swayameva buddhaveshavatirnah prishista nata bhikshuveshena.* The much pleased king gave ample rewards to the *natacharya* and the main actors who performed the play. The tradition of staging plays depicting the lives of great men, religious leaders and kings were then in vogue. The Jain work *Rayapaseniya Sutta* mentions a play based on the life of Bhagavan Mahavira enacted in his presence. It covered his entire life-span including 'his conception, exchange of foetus, boyhood, youth, sexual sports, renunciation, penance, attainment of kevalahood, the propagation of his message and finally his *nirvana*'. The *Buddha Nataka* might have likewise covered the entire life-span of the great religious teacher.

After surveying the flourishing theatrical activity in ancient India we feel no surprise when, in the fifth century B.C., the great grammarian Panini refers to *Natasutra*—a manual for actors—in his *Ashtadhyayi.* Two authors of treatises on drama, Shilalin and Krishasva, are mentioned by Panini. Commenting upon it, Vasudeva Sharan Agrawal states: 'The present treatise on dramaturgy known as *Natyashastra* of Bharata describes the *natas* as *sailalakas.* The corresponding Vedic term

used by Panini is *sailalinah natah.* It seems that Bharata's *Natyashastra* was the product of the dramatic school of Silalin.' Analysing the *sutra Pramada sammadau harshe*, Agrawal connects the word *sammada* with a word *sammadam* that occurs in lower bas-relief on the outer face of the Prasenjit pillar of the Bharhut stupa. The bas-relief depicts a dancing scene and a musical orchestra (Fig. 26). The inscription on it reads:

Sadika sammadam turam devanam
Alambusa acchara
Misakesi acchara
Padumavati acchara
Subhada acchara

The first line is translated as: 'A jovial ravishing music of the gods, gay with dramatic acting.' Listed below are the names of four beautiful dancing nymphs—Alambusa, Misakesi, Padumavati and Subhada—participating in the musical opera. An orchestra consisting of a lute-player, a cymbalist, a *tamboura* player and a hand clappist is in attendance. Two singers are also seen with the group of musicians. This suggests that at Panini's time musical operas were in vogue. As we have seen earlier, the text of the operas based on some popular legends might have been made available to the professional troupes by the poets on handsome payment.

In the fourth century B.C. many significant events took place which gave a new turn to the entire political and cultural history of the Indian sub-continent. The Greeks under the leadership of Alexander appeared on the scene with renewed vigour in 327 B.C. and started establishing themselves in the north-western regions of the country. Gandhara and Punjab started humming with their activities. The mighty Nanda kingdom crumbled in a political revolution headed by Chandragupta, son of Mura. The mentor and political adviser of the new emperor, Kautilya, laid down the foundations of state administration with a firm hand. In the famous work *Arthashastra*, among many other things, he defines the relationship of performing artistes and the state administration in clear terms.

Kautilya treated the business of entertainers as any other money-

making business in the state and imposed taxes on them. The tax collected from such entertainers was called *durga*. At the time of financial crisis, advised Kautilya, half the income of prostitutes (*rupajiva*) and actors (*kaushilava*) should be realized from them by the administrator. If troupes of professional actors from neighbouring states happened to perform in Mauryan territory, they were required to pay an entertainment tax - *preksha vetana*—of five *panas* per show.

In return Kautilya made provision for state protection and patronage to the entertainers. People were warned against slandering the actors and their art. Thieves were punished heavily for stealing the possessions of the actors. At the expense of the state, training for artistes was arranged. People were prohibited from attending dramatic performances without paying their share of arranging the performance. In fact the reference to the *Natasutras*, a textbook for actor, in the *Ashtadhyayi* indicates the existence of a well-ordained system of imparting training in histrionics right from Panini's time. Early Buddhist literature frequently mentions the *natyacharya*, a teacher of dramatics. Kautilya enjoins that the king should patronise the tutors who teach singing, dancing, acting, reading, playing on musical instruments like *veena*, *venu* and *mridanga*, recitation of dramatic dialogues to the courtesans, female slaves and the persons depending on stage performances for their livelihood. The contemporary playwright Bhasa describes courtesan Vasantasena, a beautiful heroine of his play *Charudattam*, as one who has received profound training in stagecraft. She is said to be educated in the art of entering the stage and voice modulations. It is possible that she might have received her education in the dramatic arts from one of the teachers appointed by the state for the purpose.

The method of imparting training in dramatics is described in Patanjali's *Mahabhashya*. The trainees were taken directly to the stage and were made to observe carefully the actors performing thereon. Then they were asked to act accordingly. In his book *India as Known to Panini* V.S. Agrawal says: 'Patanjali refers to *nata* teachers of dance (*akhyata*) initiating novices (*arambhakas*) not through recitation of dramatic text only but by their direct method of taking them to stage. Some scholars contend that the *shobhanikas* mentioned by Patanjali in connection with the enactment of Krishna myth were

in fact *natyacharyas*, teachers of *natas*, who for the benefit of actor-trainees demonstrated how a myth should be dramatised and enacted on stage.

In the *Kamasutra*, written in the early centuries of Christian era, the syllabus of sixtyfour arts prescribed for the training of the courtesans, includes many theatrical arts like the arts of make-up, enactment of dramatic episodes, singing, dancing and playing on musical instruments. In his commentary on the *Kamasutra*, Yashodhara says that study of ten forms of drama and their stage representation was also a necessary part of the training.

Though at many places Kautilya advised the king to arrange *samaja* or theatrical entertainments for the people, and states that it is necessary for removing fatigue caused by work, he was not much in favour of constructing permanent theatres near villages. He felt that the attention of the farmers would be diverted from their work and the economy of the state would suffer. He also imposed some sort of censorship on the items to be presented on stage. The actors could perform anywhere in the country, but they were enjoined not to make fun of socially sensitive issues like country (*desh*), caste (*jati*), family (*gotra*), a certain school of Vedic studies (*charana*), and copulation of men with women. If any person was hurt by their glib tongue or obscene gestures, magistrates were empowered to fine them orpunish them with lashes.

At various excavation sites in Magadha, particularly the ones at Patana, Bulandibagh, Kumrahar, art objects belonging to early Mauryan period have been found. These include terracotta figurines of beautiful dancing girls whom Kautilya mentions in his *Arthashastra*. They seem to be folk dancers. One of the lovely terracotta figurines is holding a *damaru*-like small musical instrument in her hand (Fig. 27). Her whole posture is suggestive of a dancing pose. She is wearing ear-rings, rings, a necklace and a *mekhala* around her slender waist. Her skirt is fluttering in the air. Another figurine of a dancer (Fig. 28) is adorned with an enormous headdress. Her skirt is parted from the middle, showing her slender and shapely legs. Both the figurines were excavated from Bulandibagh.

Another very interesting and significant item is an actor's mask found at Chirand in Bihar (Fig. 29). The measurement of this terracotta actor's prop is noted as follows: 'Length from head to lower portion of the mask 33 cm, breadth from left ear to right ear 32.2 cm, inner diameter of the lower portion of the mask 23 cm.' Writing about the mask B.P. Sinha observes: 'The mask is double faced - male and female. It must have been used at some pantomimes. Kautilya's *Arthashastra* refers to many dramatic performances in *utsava* and *samaja* gatherings. It is stratifically to be assigned to 4th-3rd century. From Nevasa a big pot looking like a mask has been reported but it is to be placed in the 1st or 2nd century A.D.' He further suggests that the *granthikas* reciting Krishna myths might have been using black and red masks according to Patanjali's *Mahabhashya.*

The mask used is broad enough to wear comfortably. The nose is broadly perforated to enable the actor to see through it because there are no holes for the eyes. The mask and thet erracotta figurines of dancing girls of the early Mauryan period found in Magadha amply prove the existence of the various theatrical arts mentioned in the *Arthashastra.*

The *Ramayana* mentions the *Vadhu Natak Sangh*, theatrical companies of *ganikas*, active in the period. Kautilya also refers to the tradition of *Stree Preksha*, dramatic performances given by women only. Later literary and epigraphical evidences confirm the existence of the practice of only women giving dramatic performances and from *Kuttanimatam* it is evident that they used to enact male roles as well. Kautilya advised the king to use male or female performing artist for spying also.

It is quite evident from the *Arthashastra* that the theatre was a flourshing trade in *c.* 400 B.C., long before India started feeling the cultural impact of the Greek civilization. Fortunately, thirteen plays belonging to this period have survived the ravages of time. These early Sanskrit plays written by Bhasa are quite different from later romantic comedies in many respects. In some of them, violence, killing, death, sleeping on the stage, fighting are shown happening on stage in full view of the audience. Majority of these plays are based on

episodes described by the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, while the remaining depict popular folk and historical tales. As no plays earlier to these are extant, scholars take Bhasa as the first Indian dramatist.

However, the grandson of Chandragupta and one of the greatest emperors India ever had, Samrat Ashoka, who ascended the Mauryan throne in the year 274 B.C. seems to have reversed the liberal policy of Kautilya towards the theatrical arts. He was not much in favour of dramatic activities like the *samaja* as is evident from one of his rock edicts. The Emperor enjoins:

> *Iyam dhammalipi devanam piyena piyadasina lekhita (I) hida na kichi jive alabhitu pajohitaye (I) No pi ca samaje kataviya (I) bahuka hi dosa samajasa devanam piye piyadasi laja dakhati (I) athi pi ca ekatiya samaja sadhumata devanam piyasa piyadasisa lajine (I)* . . .
>
> This edict on *dharma* has been caused to be inscribed by command of Devanampriya Priyadarshi. Here no animal should be killed or sacrificed. Nor shall *samaja* be held because king Devanampriya Priyadarshi sees many evils in such gatherings. But there are certain *samajas* which are considered meritorious by king Devanampriya Priyadarshi . . . (Rock Edict No. I)

Which *samajas* he considered full of evil—*bahuka hi dosa* and which one meritorious—*sadhumata* is not quite clear from the edict. However, considering the general attitude of the Master towards the theatrical arts, the *samajas* which included them might have been considered evil by his earnest royal disciple. Probably this is the first and the last effort to ban the sensuous arts by issuing a royal decree.

In another rock edict the Emperor says:

> *Se aja devanam piyasa piyadasine lajine dhammacalanena bheli-ghose aho dhammaghose vimanadasana hathini agikamdhani amnani diviani rupani dasayitu janesa*
>
> On account of the practice of *dharma* by king Priyadarshi,

> the beloved of gods, there is heard in place of sound of war drums, the sound of proclamation of *dharma*, exhibitions to the people of *vimana*, chariots, elephants, illuminations and divine representations. (Rock Edict No. IV)

The inscription refers to processional theatre or the exhibition of dramatic pageants mounted on chariots and elephants, preceded by fireworks and a troupe of drummers. The words *diviani rupani* are interpreted in different ways. Probably they may be taken as live actors in the guise of divine beings or the Buddha himself, exhibiting different scenes based on the Buddhist myths. Even today in many places such processions may be seen. In the *Yakshagana* theatre of Karnataka, the *Ankia Nat* performances of Assam and the *Dashavatar* plays of Gomantaka, a procession of actors representing divine beings proceeds from the make-up room to the place of performance with great display of fireworks and with a musical orchestra as its vanguard. The tradition of *Ratha Yatra* (Fig. 30) is still a part of temple festivals in India. *Ratha Yatra* is a festive procession of idols in a decorated chariot. Fa-hien, a Chinese pilgrim who visited India in the fourth century A.D., describes such processions. He states how four wheeled cars mounted with five storeyed bamboo structures, with gold and silver images of *devas* (deities) in them, are taken out in a procession. He says: 'On the four sides are the niches, with a Buddha seated in each and a Bodhisattva standing in attendance. There may be twenty cars, all grand and imposing, but each one different from others.'

Some scholars see in the inscription a reference to shadow theatre in which a divine procession is shown on the curtain. It is possible that the procession might have concluded with the presentation of some kind of *Bauddha Nataka* like the one presented by a *natyacharya* from Dakshinapatha before the king of Shobhavati. Probably Ashoka refers to these types of dramatic spectacles as *samaja* or *sadhu* – meritorious.

There seems to be much truth in Ashaka's observation that contemporary *samajas* were full of *bahuka hi dosa*. We have already seen that Kautilya felt the need to restrain the actors from using vulgarity and slander as entertainment. Dancers of the time sometimes used to perform provocative dances in near-nude and

semi-nude conditions. The tradition of exhibiting female charms while dancing seems to be as old as the Indus civilization. The willowy copper figurine of a danseuse from Mohenjo-daro is frankly nude. In one of the *Usha suktas* of the Rig Veda a danseuse baring her bosom to the audience is mentioned.

In *Avadanshataka* appears the story of a dancer, Kuvalaya, daughter of a *natacharya* from Dakshinapatha who arrived in the city of Rajagriha on the occasion of the festival known as *Girivalgusamagama.* She was extremely beautiful to look at and proud of her shapely body glistening with youth and health. When she appeared on the stage, the spectators held their breath—*Kuvalaya name abhirupa darshaniya prasadika sarvangapratyangopeta sa rupayauvanarogyamadamatta. Yada rangamadhyamavarati tada sarvaprekshaki sotkanthe rudvikashate.* On hearing the reputation of Buddha she went to him wearing a beautiful dress and glittering jewellery. There she started performing a most provocative dance baring her charming body: *Streelingani streechinhani streenimittani chopadarshayati.* This immensely disturbed the *bhikkus.* The story reminds us of the dances by the charming daughters of Mara performed before Gautama to deflect him from the path of *Dharma.*

In later literature too there are references to the provocative nature of the theatrical arts. Bharata refers to these and tries to put restrictions on them. He enjoins:

> One knowing the dramatic convention (*natyadharma*) should not represent sleeping on the stage. But if (such is necessary) on some pretended need one should bring the Act to a close.
>
> If out of necessity anyone sleeps alone or with anyone, no kiss or embrace or any other private acts such as biting, scratching with nails, loosening the *nivi* (knot of garment), pressing of breasts and lips, should be presented on the stage.
>
> Taking food or sporting in water doing any immodest act should not be presented on the stage.
>
> In representing various activities of women there should

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> be on the stage no ascending of the bedstead, no bath, no use of unguents and collyrium, no decoration of the body andno doing of the hair.
>
> And women of the superior and the middling types should not be shown as very scantily draped (*apavrta*) or wearing only one piece of garment. The prohibited mode (of dress) will suit only the women of the inferior type because of their low nature. But they too are not to be represented as doing what is improper.

Bharata was required to think about these stage improprieties perhaps because the performers were representing them on the stage at his time. How far Bharata and his code of censorship were taken seriously we do not know. Because a century later Patanjali tells us that on being asked by the spectators: 'To whom do you belong?' actresses used to reply, 'To you, to you', right in the theatre. Even Kalidasa in his play *Malavikagnimitra* brings Malavika on the stage scantily dressed. Parivrajika tells the *natyacharyas* to bring the dancers scantily draped so that she would be able to watch bodily movements carefully: *Sarvangasausthavabhivyaktaye vigatanepathyayoh patrayoh praveshostu.* It is interesting to note that after Ashoka beautiful gates and railings constructed around the Buddhist stupas were embellished with nude dancing figures, the *Yakshis* in diaphanous clothes (Fig. 31). The lovely daughters of Mara, a demon who tried to deviate Buddha from righteous path, were probably too fascinating to be ignored. They appear even around the monuments dedicated to Buddha who fought and conquered them in a grim battle.

Likewise the decree of the Emperor could not completely curb the theatrical activities and *prekshas* and *samajas* soon surfaced with renewed vigour. Emperor Kharavela, who restored the glory of Kalinga lost to Ashoka, also revived the festive *samajas* full of dramatic entertainment. In his second century B.C. Hathigumpha cave inscription, he takes pride in calling himself an adept in the theatrical arts—*Gandharva-veda budha.* The powerful Jain monarch who according to the inscription defeated the *Yavana* king states:

Dampa-nata-gita-vadita-sandasanahi-usava-samaja karapanahi

> *cha kidapayati nagarim*—Expert in the theatrical arts, Kharavela arranged for the entertainment of the citizens *dampa* (wrestling), *nata* (dance), *gita* (songs), *vadita* (playing on musical instruments), *usava* (festival) and *samaja* (plays).

Probably a festival full of dramatic entertainment was held in the nearby Ranigumpha cave theatre under the patronage of Kharavela. Beautiful dancing figures, panels depicting the stories of Udayana and Vasavadatta, and Shakuntala and Dushyanta, sculptures showing the *Ranga Mandapa* (dance pavilion) can be seen in Rani and other gumphas in the Khandagiri and Udayagiri hills near Bhuvaneshvara. In Maharashtra the Satavahanas extended royal patronage to the theatrical arts. The Nasik cave inscription of Vasisthiputra Pulumayi (first century A.D.) also mentions *usava-samaja,* a festival of plays. Ashoka failed to curb the popularity of the theatre.

Vatsyayana in his *Kamasutra* speaks of the conventions of holding *samajas* full of theatrical entertainment. He mentions the king Kuntala Satakarni whose wife died due to his rough ways of love making. This Satakarni king ruled in the firstc entury B.C. This shows that Vatsyayana must have written his treatise after this period. Some of his verses are quoted in the works of Kalidasa and the playwright Bhavabhuti mentions the work in the opening verses of his play *Malati Madhava.* This sets the lower limit of the date of the work. Hence we can say that it must have been written in the early centuries of the Christian era.

Vatsyayana says that for the recreation of the citizens on suitable occasions, preferably every fortnight, a *samaja* may be organized in the temple of Saraswati, the goddess of learning, and also in the temples of other deities. Actors, local as well as those who have come from the outside, with mutual cooperation, should perform plays on the occasion. Next they should be suitably rewarded for entertaining the citizens. If an actor gives an outstanding performance which is appreciated by the people, he may be requested to perform on the following day also. The respectable citizens who have come from outside to see the play should be received with due respect as it is a *Ganadharma*—a social duty.

In this context it is significant to mention an inscription which was found in 1903 at Kamal Maula Mosque, previously Bhoja Shala, at Dhar, a city near Mhow in Madhya Pradesh. Dhar was once a capital of the Paramara kings of Malava. This inscription on a black stone slab is nothing but the first two acts of the play *Parijatamarnjari* or *Vijayashri* written by Rajaguru Madana, a Gauda Brahmin. The inscription mentions two such slabs but unfortunately one still remains unlocated. The play is written as a eulogy to king Arjunavarman of Dhar who ruled in early thirteenth century. In the opening lines of the play in the inscription it is specifically mentioned that it was performed in the temple of Saraswati—*Saradadevyah Sadmani.* The inscription clearly confirms the tradition of staging plays at *samaja* festivals organized at the temple of Saraswati mentioned by Vatsyayana in the early centuries of the Christian era.

Vatsyayana makes some very interesting observations in his treatise. He says that women love most persons with deep interest in the theatrical arts. He advises a youth who desires to seduce a girl, to sit next to her while watching a play and try to flirt with her. This indicates that in ancient India there was no segregation of audiences on the basis of sex. Of course, one must remember that there was a tradition of special shows for women spectators by troupes of women actors. Vatsyayana says that because of the deep interest in dramatic shows, people watch the performances with all attention and hence are unaware of what is happening around. This, according to the author of the *Kamasutra*, is the best opportunity for a young man to quietly elope with his beloved to make love to her. He also refers to the custom of play enactment at the houses of *ganikas.* He says that the middleman appointed by the *ganika* should persuade the prospective customer to visit her house to see a play. He also cautions the men about expressing their appreciation of the histrionic skill of tender actresses. In this context he cites an example of Naradeva, a general of the Pandya king, who in an effort to touch the cheek of a dancing girl as a gesture of appreciation hurt her eye for ever.

However one of his observations regarding the languages to be used in the gatherings of intellectuals well explains why the classical Indian plays were in Sanskrit and Prakrit languages and why Bharata in his *Natyashastra* recommends the use of various regional languages

in the plays. Vatsyayana advises a speaker at such assemblies not to speak only in Sanskrit, lest he make himself unintelligible to many members of the audience. Neither should he use regional languages only or he will be considered an ignorant person. This remark of Vatsyayana best explains why along with Sanskrit, Prakrits were used in the classical plays. In the Kerala tradition of presenting Sanskrit plays, the regional language, Malayalam, is introduced to make the play intelligible to the common audience. Hence the tradition of staging classical plays has remained in vogue in the region uptil now. This shows how wise was the advice of the author of the *Kamasutra.*

Patanjali's work *Mahabhasya*, written around the same time, gives us significant information about various modes of representing a myth or a story on the stage. He explains how the myths of the killing of Kansa and the binding of Bali are visualized through different theatre media. Firstly he speaks about *shobhanikas*, a class of actors, who actually enact the whole episode on the stage. Kautilya in his *Arthashastra* mentions this class of actors. However their exact style of stage representation is not clearly stated by Kautilya. Patanjali explains it briefly. There is interesting inscription, at present housed in the Mathura Museum, which speaks about the *shobhanikas*. Belonging to the first century B.C., this is probably the first extant inscription which tells an actress by name, and mentions her family and her faith. It runs thus:

> *Namo Arahato Vardhamanasa Araya ganikaya Lonasobhikaye dhitu samanasavikaye Nadaye ganikaye Vasu(ye) Arahato Devik(u)la ayagasabha prapa sil(a) pa(to) patisth(a) pito Nigantha-nam Araha(ta) yatane as(ha) M(a) tare bhaginiye dhitara putrena sarvena cha parijanena Arahata pujaye.*

> Adoration to the Arahat Vardhamana. The daughter of the matron (?) courtesan Lonasobhika, the disciple of the ascetics, the junior (?) courtesan Vasu has erected a shrine to the Arahat, a hall of homage (*ayagasabha*), a cistern (and) a stone slab at the sanctuary of the Nirgrantha Arahata, together with her mother, (her sister) her daughter, he son and her whole household, in the honour of the Arahata (Fig. 32).

As is evident from the *Arthashastra* and other works, *ganikas* were the custodians of the theatrical arts in India. They were engaged in the dual profession of acting and prostitution. Kautilya enjoins that the sons of a *ganika* should be made chief professional actors (*rangopajiyani*) and dancers expert in rhythm (*talavachar*). The sons of *lona* (beautiful) *sobhika* (women) might have been presenting the Krishna myth as mentioned in the *Mahabhashya*. *Sobhikas* seem to be Jain by faith. Krishna is accepted by the Jains also. The actors of this community living in Mathura may have presented on the stage Jain myths also. It is significant to note that *Ras* dance-dramas are common to the Jain and Vaishnava cults. It is clear from the constructions mentioned and dedicated to the faith that the family must have been earning well. This implies that the theatre was already a flourishing business.

Another mode of presenting a myth on stage, according to Patanjali, is by using pictures, depicting the relevant scenes, in a story sequence. This art was known in ancient India as *mankha vidha*. It is said that Mankhaliputta Goshala, a contemporary of Mahavira and one of the famous apostles of the Ajivak cult, was an adept in this art. *Mankhas* have been defined as *Chitra-phalaka-hasta-bhikshaka*—beggars who move around with picture scrolls in their hands. They used to show the pictures and sing songs explaining the story depicted in the scroll. According to some scholars the profession of the *Aditi* woman mentioned by Kautilya in his *Arthashastra* was of showing pictures of different gods and goddesses to people to earn money. *Yamapata*—a painted cloth in which Yama, the god of death, is shown punishing the sinners is quite common in the Indian countryside. The *Harshacharita* of Banabhatta (7th century A.D.) mentions *Yamapatika*—exhibitor of *Yamapatas*—and his art. It says: '. . . entering the bazaar street, he saw a *Yamapatika*, surrounded by a number of eager and excited boys, explaining to them the fruits of the other world from a painted picture scroll, with a Yama on a terrible buffalo in it. Holding the scroll in his left hand he was seen pointing with a cane in his left hand the scenes painted on it.'

Mankhas are mentioned in many Jain Prakrit works like *Kalpasutra*, *Pindaniryukti*, *Avashakachurni* and *Brihatkalpabhashya Pithika*. They were known as *Gauriputraka* and *Kedaraka* also. '*Mankhah kedariyo*

yah patamupadarsha', says *Pindaniryukti*. The impact of this art of relating a story of an episode with the help of pictures is seen on the classical Sanskrit dramas also. In Bhasa's famous play *Dutavakyam*, king Duryodhana, holding a scroll of neatly painted pictures—*Suvyaltama likhitoyam chitrapatah*—depicting a series of scenes related to the episode of disrobing Pandava's queen Draupadi, narrates the full story like a *mankha*. In a sixth century play *Mudrarakshasa*, we come across a spy who spreads a *Yamapata* and sings explaining the pictures. In the first act of eighth century dramatist Bhavabhuti's play *Uttara-rama-charitam*, Laxmana takes his brother Rama and his wife Sita to a picture gallery where paintings of an artist named Arjuna were displayed. Then Laxmana, acting as a *mankha*, explains the series of paintings to Rama and Sita. Bhasa and Bhavabhuti use this device in the beginning of their plays to establish the context of the plays. The traditional art of the *mankhas* still lingers in some parts of India. The Bhopas of Rajasthan, fixing a painted cloth (Fig. 33) depicting the saga of their hero Pabuja to two bamboo poles, sing his story with some dancing. *Behula Pat* is famous in Bengal. The *Chitrakathi Thakurs* of Pinguli village in Maharashtra narrate stories from the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* with the help of a series of pictures.

The third important mode of stage representation of a myth mentioned by Patanjali is the dramatic narration of *granthikas*. He says that the *granthikas* divide themselves into two groups, one of Kansa *bhaktas* and another of Vasudeva *bhaktas* (i.e. the followers of Kansa and the followers of Vasudeva). They paint their faces black and red respectively. *Granthikas* belong to the class of story-tellers like *suta* and *kathaka* mentioned in the ancient literary works. Kaiyata in his commentary on *Mahabhashya* actually identifies *granthikas* with *kathakas*. The *granthikas* of Patanjali's time seem to have adopted a novel method of story-telling. The groups singing alternately may well have used a dramatic manner of narration. In Gomantaka there is a very interesting dramatic form known as *Balakrida Kala*. Here performers divide themselves into two groups—one belonging to Krishna and the other to Pralambhasur, a brother of Kansa. The groups ask each other interesting riddles. This form comes quite close to the *granthika* tradition of stage representation mentioned by Patanjali. However some scholars depending on the tenth century writer Kaiyata's identification of *kathakas* with *granthikas*, opine that the modern *kathak*

story-tellers who are seen practising their art in the temples of Ayodhya and elsewhere represent the ancient tradition of *granthikas* mentioned by Patanjali. However the *kathak* is a lone reciter who narrates the story with some dancing and dramatic gestures but no group division is involved.

How rich was the theatrical tradition in India centuries before the birth of Christ is best seen in the encyclopaedic work of Bharata which was written around second century B.C. In his *Natyashastra* Bharata gives elaborate descriptions of various types of theatre halls, different forms of dramas, conventions of theatrical representation, different modes of acting and dancing, types of make-up and stage property, and all other subjects connected with the theatrical arts. It is far more elaborate in its scope than *De Poetica* of Aristotle. He gives the theory of *Rasa* which became the basis for Indian aesthetics.

The Framework

The *Natyashastra* gives us a fairly good idea of various dramatic forms extant around the second century B.C. or even earlier. Right from the simple one-act play in monologue form to the more elaborate two to ten act plays in dialogue form with greater participation of actors, Bharata has enumerated in all ten types known as *dasha rupaka*. They give a clear picture of the evolution of theatre. Manomohan Ghosh has classified them as follows:

1. One-act plays in a monologue form: *Bhana*.

2. One-act plays with one or more characters: *Vithi*.

3. One-act plays on different kinds of subject matters and more characters: *Vyayoga*, *Prahasana* and *Utsrstikanta*.

4. (a) Plays with three loosely knit acts and many characters: *Samavakara*.

5. (b) Plays with four such acts and many characters: *Dima* and *Ihamriga*.

6. Plays with five to ten well-knit acts and many characters: *Nataka* and *Prakarana*.

Though it is not possible to classify the Rig Vedic plays according to the definitions of different types of *rupakas* given by Bharata, we can broadly say that all types of one-act and plays mentioned above were extant around *c.* 1500 B.C. Epics like the *Ramayana* and ancient Buddhist literature, particularly the *Jataka* tales, mention *nataka* in clear terms which is the most developed form among the *rupakas* mentioned by Bharata. We may venture to say, therefore, that all the ten forms of *rupakas* developed by *c.* 600 B.C. We start finding concrete evidence of the existence of *nataka* form of *rupaka* from *c.* 400 B.C. when Bhasa appears on the scene. From one-act plays like *Dutavakyam*, *Dutaghatotkacham*, *Urubhangam*, and three-act *samavakaras* like *Pancharatram* to full-fledged six or seven act *natakas* like *Swapnavasavadattam*, *Pratimanatakam*, Bhasa has handled various types of *rupakas*. It would not be wrong to say under the circumstances that *nataka* may have been in vogue two to three centuries before Bhasa. This again points at *c.* 600 to 500 B.C. as a probable period in which the most developed forms of *rupaka* like *nataka* and *prakarana* were in vogue.

In the *Natyashastra* we find elaborate descriptions of three types of theatres—square, rectangular and triangular in three different sizes each. The tradition of constructing temporary or permanent theatres for dramatic performances was quite ancient. The *Jatakas* give descriptions of open-air amphitheatres and also covered ones. In the *Arthashastra* Kautilya enjoins that no permanent theatre should be constructed near a village. Terms like *ranga*, *samajvat*, *sabha*, etc. appear in ancient literature denoting some kind of theatre hall. In the *Adiparva* of the *Mahabharata* there is an elaborate description of a *samajavata* constructed for the marriage ceremony of princess Draupadi, in which *nata*, *vaitalika*, *nartaka*, *suta magadha* and other performing artists exhibited their art. *Ranga mandapas* were also erected to conduct wrestling bouts and to exhibit the skill in wielding various weapons.

Two very interesting stone carvings, belonging to the second century B.C., give us some idea about the theatres available at the time. Carved in relief between the doors of the cells opening in the bottom

storey corridor of the famous Ranigumpha cave near Bhuvaneshvar, is an interesting dancing girl, accompanied by a musical orchestra, seen dancing under a well decorated canopy supported by four pillars (Fig. 34). The nearby Hathigumpha cave bears the inscription of Emperor Kharavela which mentions the dramatic performances held there. The relief depicts the scene of dramatic festivities arranged by Kharavela. Here the theatre has a very simple structure: a four pillared canopy. A similar structure is depicted on a stone slab (Fig. 35) recovered from the Kankali Tila at Mathura and now housed in the Lucknow Museum. Supported by four pillars there is an inverted V-shaped tiled roof. The hut is open on all sides, a play is on, and members of the audience are seen sitting in the open.

However Bharata's theatres are architectonically quite sophisticated and even take into account the principles of acoustics and the visibility of a stage performance from the last row of seats, proper ventilation arrangements and aesthetics of interior decor. The area of the playhouse is divided into two parts—one forming the auditorium and the other the stage. The auditorium is provided with rows of seats, one above the other, like a series of steps. The arrangement of seats is such that spectators sitting anywhere in the auditorium are able to view the stage and the performance properly.

The stage or performing arena is flanked by *mattavarinis*, with the make-up room, *nepathya*, at the back. Doors are provided to the *nepathya* for the exit and entry of the actors. The stage area just close to the *nepathya* is called *ranga-shirsha* and the portion beyond that is *ranga-pitha*. There is lot of controversy about various architectural terms used by Bharata, particularly about *mattavarini*. In the fourth act of Rajashekhara's play *Balaramayana* occurs the term *mattavarini*. It says: *yadatsaiva purandarasyadanasya chaturdisham mattavarinipha-lakeshu Ramachitra likhitam*. It seems that the chariot was well covered from all sides by planks which were painted. This indicates that probably both sides of the stage were covered with wooden planks to guard against any encroachment on the performing arena. The Koothambalam temple theatres in Kerala which are designed according to Bharata's specifications do not provide any side wing or wings to the stage proper.

The roof of the theatre is supported by a number of pillars. The walls around are smooth, white-washed, and provided with windows for ventilation. The walls are decorated with paintings of 'creepers, men and women, and their amorous exploits'. The depiction of *Mithunas* couples in semi-erotic or erotic postures—was supposed to be extremely auspicious, hence, on many Indian temples, *Mithunas* in different postures are freely depicted. According to Indian aesthetics, *sringar* or love is supposed to be *rasa-raj*, the king among the nine basic sentiments which are depicted in plays. Love is the theme of a majority of classical plays that have survived. Hence it was natural for the walls of the playhouse to have paintings of amorous couples engaged in love play. Because of the sensuous nature of the theatrical arts, religious teachers like Buddha, and law-givers like Manu, prohibited *snatakas* (students) and *bhikkus* (monks) from attending the dramatic performances. Manu indignantly says: 'Sport, dice, sleeping by day, women, liquor, song, dance and music, and vain wandering about are tenfold class of vice arising from lust.' He enjoins the *brahmacharins* (pious celibates) to refrain from vices like dancing and singing. He further remarks: 'Let him (a gentleman) not dance nor sing, nor play on musical instruments, nor clap his hands, nor gnash his teeth, nor in passion let him roar out.' But these edicts could not prevent men from attending the theatres, such is the fascination of the theatrical arts.

Bharata codified various symbolic gestures and developed a very elaborate and rich system of *abhinaya* capable of expressing all sorts of dramatic sentiments. It may be described as the earliest extant text-book of acting. Bharata made it possible to translate any piece of dramatic poetry or dialogue into a series of mobile and liquid actions, flowing one from another with ease and grace. He has also given instructions about how to prepare stage property required for the production of a play. He writes elaborately about costumes, make-up, jewellery, and practically everything connected with the art of the theatre. Defining the scope of dramatic art he states: 'There is no wise maxim, no learning, nor art or craft, no device, no action that is not found in the drama.' Bharata's work covers all aspects of this life-size art. Describing the characteristics of drama Bharata says:

Drama is representation of the states (*bhavanukarana*) of the

three worlds. (In it) sometimes there is (reference to) duty, sometimes to games, sometimes to money, sometimes to peace and sometimes laughter is found in it, sometimes fight, sometimes love-making and sometimes killing (of people).

This teaches duty to thosewh o go against duty, love to those who are eager for its fulfilment, and it chastises those who are ill-bred or unruly, promotes self-restraint in those who are disciplined, gives courage to cowards, energy to heroic persons, enlightens men of poor intellect and gives wisdom to the learned.

This gives diversion to kings, and firmness (of mind) to persons afflicted with sorrow and (hints of acquiring) money to those who are for earning it, and it brings composure to persons agitated in mind. The drama is a mimicry of actions and conducts of people, which is rich in various emotions, and which depicts different situations. This will relate to actions of men good, bad and indifferent, and will give courage, amusement and happiness as well as counsel to them all.

The drama will be thus instructive to all, through actions and states depicted in it, and through sentiments arising out of it. It will also give relief to unlucky persons who are afflicted with sorrow and grief or (over)work, and will be conducive to observance of duty as well as to fame, long life, intellect and general good, and will educate people.

Stories taken out of the Vedic lore as well as semi-historic tales (so embellished that they are) capable of giving pleasure in the world, are called drama. A mimicry of the exploits of gods, *asuras*, kings as well as householders in this world is called drama. And when human nature, with its joys and sorrows, is depicted by means of representation through gestures and the like (i.e. words, costume and *sattva*) it is called drama.

The initial purpose of the dramatic arts was magico-religious and recreative. The Rig Veda says that laughter and dance prolong life.

In the *Ramayana* the humorous plays were arranged to elevate the mood of Rama's brother Bharata who was feeling depressed after witnessing bad dreams. In the *Dasannaka Jataka* we are told that attending dramatic performances is the best way of forgetting sorrows. The minister says to the king:

> *Maharaja rajangane samajjo*
> *vatttai tam olokentanam*
> *dukkham pi na dukkham hoti*

> O great king, there is a *samajja* in the palace yard; if men look at it, sorrow turns into joy.

Kautilya also notices the exhilarating effect of the theatrical arts on persons tired after work. He says: 'Indulgence in pleasures by country people consumes little for the sake of the removal of fatigue caused by work and after consuming leads to application to work once again.' He further enjoins the king to organize *samajotsavas* according to tradition of conquered people and participate in it to win them over to his side. Bharata in his elaborate discussion on the usefulness of the theatrical arts has included all these factors and in addition stressed their educative potentialities. He does not overlook its ritualistic aspect also. He specifically says:

> The gods are never so pleased on being worshipped with scents and garlands, as they are delighted with the performance of dramas. The man who properly attends the performance of music and dramas, will (after his death) attain the happy and meritorious path in the company of brahmanic sages.
>
> He who always hears the reading of this (*shastra*) which is auspicious, sportful, originating from Brahma's mouth, very holy, pure, good, destructive of sins, and who puts this into practice or witnesses the performance (of a drama), will attain the same (blessed) goal which the masters of the Vedic path and the masters of the Vedic lore, the performers of sacrifices or the givers of gifts, will in the end attain.

This goes to show the maturity the dramatic arts had reached

around second century B.C. Bharata mentions plays like *Amritmanthana* and *Tripurdaha.* Panini, Bhasa and Bharata mention earlier authors who wrote treatises on dramaturgy. In the second act of Bhasa's play, *Avimaraka*, the jester—*vidushaka*—boastfully remarks that he had read full five verses of a *natyashastra* named *Ramayana.* The works on dramaturgy presuppose an existence of number of plays and their enactment on stage. *Natyashastras* could be written only after the dramatic form had evolved and matured. But except for Bhasa's plays no dramatic literature of the period earlier to Christian era has survived. Between Bhasa and Ashvaghosha, whose plays on Buddhist themes were discovered in Tufan, there is a gap of five centuries. After a further gap of about three centuries we get the plays of Kalidasa. In the beginning of his play *Malavikagnimitram,* Kalidasa refers to playwrights like Bhasa, Saumillika and Kaviputra, but the plays of two latter writers are lost to posterity. But on the basis of evidences available to us we can safely assume the existence of plays well before the time of Panini.

Bharata gives quite interesting information about the contemporary theatre profession. Jealousy and hostility among the various dramatic troupes fighting for popular support or award in dramatic competition was not uncommon. Sometimes individual spectators were bribed by the rival dramatic troupes to mix with the audience and create disturbance by shouting, noisy clapping, throwing mud, cow-dung, stones at the performers. Plagiary was also practised by the less scrupulous playwrights while penning script for a dramatic troupe. The careless or ignorant actors were found guilty of putting on wrong make-up, ornaments or dress, forgetting dialogues, exhibiting defective stage manners. Sometimes they were found guilty of singing benedictory verses in the honour of a deity other than one whose festival was being celebrated. Bharata also records various types of audience responses indicating approval or disapproval of the play-production. As a token of appreciation spectators used to offer cloth or rings to the actors. Later works like the *Kamasutra* record incidents of actors being harmed by the over-enthusiastic audience response though appreciative in character. When Naradeva, a general of the Pandya king, tried to touch the cheek of a beautiful actress, Chitralekha, while she was dancing the poor girl lost her eye.

We find several instances of over-generous spectators and greedy

actors in ancient Indian literature. *Bhadraghata Jataka* informs us about a son of a rich merchant who being extremely generous to actors and dancers lost all his riches in no time. In the *Harivamsha Purana* we find the pleased spectators of Vajrapur offering valuable jewellery, chariots, elephants and other gifts to the visiting dramatic troupe of Yadavas losing everything they had in the process. It is Kautilya who sternly warns the actors against accepting undue reward even though it is offered. The instances of *natyacharyas* eloping with their beautiful or rich female disciples or young boys running after actresses and leaving their homes were not rare. The *Kathasaritsagara* tells us a story about a dance teacher of *Madhyadesha* named Labdhavara who eloped with a queen named Anangaprabha who was his disciple. For a near similar crime a Roman actor was executed. The *Dhammapada* refers to a youth who leaves his home to wander with a female acrobat he falls in love with after watching her performances. Even kings were infatuated with dancing girls. The *Rajatarangini* relates the story of a king who took a temple dancing girl to royal seraglio as one of his queens. The Roman history records a near similar incident but with an unexpected turn. Justinian, a sixth century emperor, after marrying a popular strip-tease actress, banned the theatre itself.

Actresses were the earning members of the family and enjoyed sexual liberty. The *Kamasutra* says that actresses should marry the persons who will encourage their art. The husbands of dancing girls were called *jayajiva*, the men living on the incomes of their wives. Hence the *Agni Purana* states that if wives of *gopa* (milkman), *shaundika* (person who prepares wines), *rajaka* (washerman) or *shailusha* (actor) incur debt, it should be repaid by their husbands as they live on the income of their wives.

Theatre in South India

Since pre-historic times the theatrical arts were flourishing in the southern peninsula. If we accept the theory that the Indus civilization belongs to proto-Dravidians who were pushed to southern India by invading hordes of Aryans around 1500 B.C., we can safely say that they migrated with their tradition of dancing and puppetry to their new place of habitation. Speaking about the copper figurine of a dancing girl from Mohenjo-daro, art historians like Benjamin Rowland take her

protruding lower lip as a sign of a Dravidian physical trait. Tamil is the most ancient among the south Indian languages. The earliest extant Tamil work, *Tolkappiyam*, written around the fifth century B.C., contains references to the theatrical arts. Kural literature belonging to *c.* second century B.C. also refers to the theatrical arts.

We get a wealth of material on the rich theatrical traditions of south India in two Tamil epics, *Silappadikaram* and *Manimekalai.* Earlier among the two is *Silappadikaram*, a story of an anklet, written by Ilanko-Atikal around the second century A.D. It gives a vivid picture of ancient theatrical traditions in the southern regions. The writer describes in detail various kinds of dances, music, songs and gives information about the performing artists associated with these arts.

We find the tradition of ancient magico-religious and ritualistic dances still prevalent in the region. On the full-moon day of Chittirai, beautifully attired elderly maidens used to sacrifice 'boiled grains, sweetened sesame balls, meat mixed with rice, flowers, incense and toddy' on the altar of the guardian deity and perform *tunankai* and *kuravai* dances, after being possessed by the holy *bhuta*, to ward off evil. In the temple of Aiyai, the popular deity of hunters, or in a centrally located part of the tribal settlement, encircled by a thorny fence, a female oracle used to perform a ritual dance 'with appropriate gestures, hair standing on end, hands raised aloft, moving from one place to another'. Songs and dances of hill-people are also mentioned. When the Chera king visited the mountains he heard 'the songs of hill-women accompanying the dances (Fig. 36) proper to each region' and 'music of the priest in honour of the victorious God of the red lance'. A full chapter, '*Kunrak Kuravai*', is devoted to the description of tribal songs and dances performed in honour of the deified heroine of the epic, so that 'the great hill may, without diminution, flourish in plenty'. The song accompanied by dance is in dialogue form—a sort of tribal opera performed by the hill-girls. In one of the lovely songs, the love-smitten girl secretly laughs at her mother who sends a magician to cure her. She says to her maid:

> O good girl with bracelets! I am moved to laughter. To cure me of the (love) sickness caused by the owner of the cool hill

on which pepper grows, my mother has sent for an exorcist.

O good girl with lovely bangles! This again provokes my laughter! If the exorcist who is appointed to deliver me from love-sickness caused by the lord of these mountains, comes, that exorcist is a fool. If the son of Shiva, seated under the banyan tree manifests himself, then he will be a greater fool.

Replies the maid: The son of the god seated under the banyan tree will come riding his peacock with his consort to the courtyard where the exorcist will be performing his 'veriya-tal' dance. I shall ask his blessings on our marriage with the lord of this great mountain.

In this chapter of the epic we find probably the earliest collection of romantic tribal songs of the southern region. These songs were sung, and danced too, by the girls to attract their lovers.

The *Acciyar Kuravai*, ritualistic dances of the cowherd community described in the epic, are nothing but *ras* dances popular in the Vraja region. The ever migrating cowherd community might have carried the *ras* tradition to the distant south with them. *Gatha Saptashati*, a beautiful collection of folk songs in couplet form, written in Maharash-tri Prakrit a century earlier, also mentions *ras* dances. The dance uses the following story. An elderly lady of the cowherd community of Madura arranges these dances to ward off the evil. When she observed that the milk in the pot has not curdled, the beautiful eyes of the big humped bulls are full of tears, the butter in the pot is not melt-ing, herds of cows with their four-nippled udders are shuddering and bellowing in fear, while the big bells tied to their necks fall down, she senses an impending calamity. She arranges the performance of this dance to 'alleviate the grief of the cattle' which was once performed by Mayavan (Krishna), his elder brother Balarama, beautiful Pinnai of the long lance-like eyes with the fair *gopis* in the Vraja region. All aspects of ritualistic drama are clearly manifest in this opera of the cowherdesses. The girls in the guise of Mayavan, Balarama and Pinnai participate in the dance. Here *ras* dance is performed not as a recrea-tion or amusement but as a ritual with a specific purpose of warding off impending evil suggested by the ill omens.

Along with tribal dances the epic mentions folk songs and dances also. The farmers before taking up the ploughing of the fields used to sing benedictory songs and farm-labourers while driving the cattle, reaping the paddy, threshing the corn used to sing and dance. The minstrels used to visit villages and give musical performances with the accompaniment of 'round-shaped tabor smeared with mud'. The epic says: 'There was also the sound of rural songs sung to new tunes by low-caste women in their drunken moods (Fig. 37) while they looked through their fish-like large eyes and uttered indecent words standing in playful postures and threw mud upon each other, covering up their broad shoulders and breasts with mud, having removed the faded fragrant flowers from their hair and replaced them with paddy-shoots.' The village fun resembles the famous *Holi* festival of northern India.

City life was gay with various kinds of theatrical entertainments. Like the Mauryan cities, the south Indian cities too had separate quarters for professional entertainers. Describing the ancient capital city of the Cholas, *Puhar*, the epic *Silappadikaram* says: 'There were separate quarters where dwelt *Sutas* and *Magadhas*, religious dancers, astronomers, mock dancers, prostitutes, actresses, maidens bearing flowers and betels, maid-servants, bagpipe musicians, drummers of different sorts, buffoons and jesters.' The lofty Pandyan capital of Madura also had separate habitation for these professional entertainers. The epic relates:

> There were residences of courtesans and of dancers who knew the technique of the two musical conventions, intended for royal and popular performances respectively, and had perfect knowledge of the four characteristics of dancing, songs, time-beats, the music of bagpipes accompanied by musical instruments of leather used in the dancing theatre . . . caught in the eye-nets of these goddess-like girls, even religious men take leave of their disciplined senses, while young people dallying carnally with girls, like bees sucking honey from flower after flower, and new initiates to the revelries of Cupid, will not leave those mansions, without listening to the girls' songs, and to the parrot-like talk of the women skilled in sixtyfour arts.

As we have already seen, the list of these arts includes the art of presenting plays—*Natakakhyayika Darshanam*. It seems that here

also *ganikas* were the custodians of the theatrical arts. The epic also refers to well-equipped theatre halls too. In its third canto, there is an elaborate description of the theatre in which beautiful Madhavi performed eleven kinds of *kuttus*. *Kuttu* is the most ancient form of dance in the Tamil land. I. Shekhar gives the list of *kuttus* quoted by Atiyarkkunallar, the fifteenth century commentator of the *Silappadikaram*:

Vasai Kuttu	deals with satire
Pugall Kuttu	deals with eulogy
Vettiyal Kuttu	deals with royal themes
Poduviyal Kuttu	deals with folklore
Venic Kuttu	deals with musical themes
Vari-candik-Kuttu	deals with the eulogy of gods
Iyalbuk Kuttu	deals with natural descriptions
Desik Kuttu	deals with folk themes
Vinoda Kuttu	deals with general recreation
Arya Kuttu	deals with Aryan lore

Many medieval inscriptions refer to the tradition of staging *kuttus* in the temple dancing halls. A Tamil inscription found at Kanchipuram speaks about the troupe of actors enacting *kuttus* at Kanchipuram and many other places (*A.R. Ep.*, 1921, No. 42). An inscription of Rajendra Chola I speaks about a gift of land by the great assembly of Kamaravalli-Chaturvedimangalam to Sakkai Marayan Vikramasolan for performing *Sakkai Kuttu* thrice on each of the festivals *Margali-tiruvadirai* and *Vaigasi-tiruvadirai*. (*A.R. Ep.*, 1914, No. 65). A similar grant was made to a shrine of Sadiruvidanganayakar set up by Kulottungasola Kidarattaraiyan for performing *Sandi-Kuttu* during the *Tiruvadirai* festival that falls in the month of *Vaigasi* (*Ibid.*, No. 254). The *kuttu* tradition flourished under the patronage of the temple institution since the time of *Silappadikaram*. Even today we find *Terukuttu* troupes performing mythological dance-dramas particularly during the Draupadiamman festival held in the summer.

The epic also mentions dance-masters, music-teachers, flutists, masters of lute, composers of dramatic songs with deep knowledge of drama. According to Bharata, the origin of the theatre is related to

Indra's flag-staff festival. In the south, the staff, *talaikkol*, representing Indra's son Jayanta, used to be established with much fanfare and ritual worship on the stage before starting the dramatic performance. The similarity between the two traditions is striking. Among the various dances performed by different deities, the epic describes an interesting sword dance of Kumari. 'Sword in hand, and to the repeated tinkling of her metal-filled anklet, her bracelet, and her waist-band, all of gold, our Goddess danced the *marakkala* dance of victory', it says. There is a very interesting sculpture of a sword-dancer in the Mathura Museum which mostly answers to the description of the victory dance mentioned in the epic. The practice of going for a picnic on the sea-shore and spending the day in the company of dancers and singers is also mentioned in the epic. An elaborate description of such a picnic, full of theatrical amusements, occurs in *Harivamsha Purana* composed around the fourth century A.D.

The epic also mentions flourishing theatrical activities in different southern regions including Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra and Kerala. When the mighty Chera king encamped near Nilagiri, he was entertained by dancers from the Konkana country, and the fierce *Karunatar* (actors from Karnataka), in their respective dresses and ornaments. The beautiful actresses, 'whose dark curly hair was loosely woven with shining garlands, whose incipient breasts were adorned with jewelled chains and whose long eyes resembled dark carps', performed before the king. Likewise, 'one hundred and two actresses, two hundred and eight accompanying singers and one hundred jesters' from Andhra were granted audience by the king. This shows that the theatrical arts were flourishing all over southern peninsula.

The *Chakyar* actors from Kerala are also mentioned in the epic.

> A Chakkayar, dancing expert from Paraiyur, exhibited the dance known as *Kotticcetam*, danced with Uma as a part of Himself by the mighty Shiva, while the anklet worn on his beautiful feet tinkled, the big *parai* borne in his loving and graceful hand sounded, his red eyes expressed a thousand charming suggestions and his red matted hair tossed in all directions, her *patakam* did not throb and yet her *sutakam* was not displaced, her waist-band did not produce any sound, her

breasts did not shake, her head jewels were not disturbed and her slick curl did not get loosened.

In this dance the *Chakyar* appeared in the *Ardhanarinateshvar* form of Shiva, half his body representing Uma and the other half Shiva. While one part of his body danced the other remained static. A similar description occurs in the *Jataka* literature also. In the *Suruchi Jataka* there is a mention of a *nata* who could make half his body dance in which one hand, one foot, one eye, one tooth go dancing, throbbing, flickering to and fro, while all the rest remain still.

The art of the *Chakyars* (Fig. 38) is mentioned in one of the inscriptions recorded above as *Sakkaikutta*. They later took up the enactment of classical Sanskrit plays in their peculiar *Kudiattam* style. Even now the *Chakyars* are seen performing Sanskrit plays in the Koothambalam temple theatres of Trichur and other places in Kerala.

Indo-Greek Theatre



Dionysus:

. . . and so, along all Asia's swarming littoral of towered cities where Greeks and foreign nationals mingling, live, my progress made.
There
I taught my dances to the feet of living men, establishing my mysteries and rites,
that I might be revealed on earth for what I am:
a god.

The Bacchae, Euripides



The Dionysian Invasion

We find clear reference to the dramatic arts in ancient Indian literature indicating the existence of dramatic texts which the performers must have taken up for enactment and stage representation. A look at the dialogue hymns of the Rig Veda would give us some idea of the types of plays available at the time. A *Jataka* story informs us that the poets were offered handsome rewards for writing scripts for the dramatic troupes. But all this dramatic literature is lost to posterity. It is from the fourth century B.C. that we start finding plays in the modern sense of the term in India. Bhasa's plays are the earliest available ones in India. But fortunately a number of ancient Greek plays have survived the onslaught of time. The plays of Aeschylus (526-456 B.C.), Sophocles (496-406 B.C.), Euripides (485-406 B.C.), Aristophanes (450-386 B.C.) and Menander (342-290 B.C.) are available to us. Among the Roman playwrights we find the plays of Plautus (240-180 B.C.), Terence (184-160 B.C.) and Seneca (4 B.C.-65 A.D.). This dramatic literature is very rich and varied and can be described as a unique cultural heritage. Contrary to what most scholars believe the controversy regarding the Greek influence on Indian theatre was not initiated by modern German orientalists like Weber and E. Windisch. In fact they perpetuate the line of thought established by the early Greek writers on India. Prominent, and probably the first among them, is Megasthenes who visited India between 302 and 288 B.C. as an envoy of Seleucus Nicator to the royal court of Emperor Sandrakottos—Chandragupta Maurya.

Megasthenes wrote a very fascinating account of ancient India which has survived in the form of elaborate quotations in the works of later Greek writers. These fragments give very interesting information about India. Writing about the early history of the country he states: 'Father Bacchus was the first who invaded India and was first of all who triumphed over vanquished Indians – from him to Alexander the Great 6451 years are reckoned with 3 months.'

Bacchus-Dionysus (Fig. 39), the pre-historic deity of wine, vegetation and theatre, according to these writers brought to India the science of cultivation and arts like music and dancing. An echo of this idea is found in the works of many Greek writers of the time. Flavius Arrianus who was born towards the end of the first century at Nikomedeia writes:

> Indians have been particularly distinguished among the nations as lovers of dance and song ever since Dionysus and his attendant Bacchanals made their festive progress through the realms of India.
>
> The Indians worship other Gods and Dionysus (Fig. 40) himself in particular with cymbals and drums, because he so taught them; and that he also taught them Satyric dance, as the Greeks call it Kordax.

It is clear from the literary and historical evidences that the myth of the Dionysian expedition to India is an aftermath of Alexander's invasion of the country. Homer, the Greek epic poet, mentions Dionysus in his *Iliad* and confers upon him the epithet 'raging', denoting the orgiastic character of his cult. But he never associates the deity with India. Aeschylus (525-456 B.C.), one of the earliest known Greek playwrights, who is credited with the introduction of the second actor, mentions India in his magnificent play, *The Suppliants.* The ancient Argiva king says:

> Moreover I hear tell of Indians, of women that go roving on camels, mounted horse-fashioned, riding on padded saddles, them that are citizens of a land neighbouring Ethiopians . . .

Scholars believe that this is the earliest mention of Indians by name in the Greek works, though the king has considerably confused the geographical location. Aeschylus does not mention the Dionysian myth about India.

In his masterpiece, *The Bacchae*, written at the end of his life, Greek playwright Euripides (*c.* 480-406 B.C.) mentions in the prologue the Dionysian invasion of Asia and his teaching of the theatrical arts to the conquered people. But in the list of countries through which he marched triumphantly, the name of India does not occur. In the opening speech Dionysus says:

> I am Dionysus, the son of Zeus
> come back to Thebes, this land where I was born . . .
> Far behind me lie those golden-rivered lands, Lydia and Phrygia
> where my journeying began. Overland I went,
> across the steppes of Persia where the sun
> strikes hotly down, through Bactrian fastness and the grim waste
> of Media. Thence to rich Arabia I came;
> and so, along all Asia's swarming littoral
> of towered cities where Greeks and foreign
> nationals mingling, live, my progress made.
> There I taught my dances to the feet of living
> men, establishing my mysteries and rites,
> that I might be revealed on earth for what I am:
> a god.

It seems that by Asia Euripides means Asia Minor, particularly Lydia. After the exit of Dionysus enters the Chorus of Asia. It proclaims:

> Out of the land of Asia,
> down from holy Tmolus,
> seeking the service of god,
> for Bromius we come.

Bromius is the epithet of Dionysus, meaning thunder. Mount Tmolus adorned with lovely flowers rings the city of Sardis, the capital of Lydia. From here come the women devotees of Dionysus who com-

prise the chorus and whom Dionysus addresses as Asian women. It is obvious that India was attached to a mythical Dionysian empire after Alexander's historical conquest of some portion of the country.

Another writer who wrote about India was Herodotus. His references to India present interesting mixture of fact and fantasy. While he faithfully records historical facts like the exploration of the crocodile-breeding Indus by a Greek named Scylax at the command of the Persian king Darius; he also speaks about fantastic creatures like the Indian gold-digging ant, bigger than a fox. He is aware of the fact that India is a country crowded with people, and with diverse languages. But to this he adds his information about the tribals who copulate in the open like cattle and whose semen is black. Had the myth about Dionysus been current during his time, Herodotus would certainly have recorded it in his *Histories.*

This implies that the myth which Megasthenes records and Arrian supports, must have, in all probability come into existence as an aftermath of Alexander's invasion. For its correct interpretation we should connect it with the Indo-Greek period of Indian history. The Greeks struck upon the similarity between the Dionysian and Indian cults, particularly in the area of theatre. They must have come across various ancient Indian cults in which the rituals included dance and music like the Dionysian and other fertility cults of Greece. The Greek writers actually identified some of the Indian deities with their own Dionysus and Heracles:

> . . . such as them as live on the mountains are worshippers of Dionysus but the Philosophers who live on plains worship Heracles . . .
>
> This Heracles was especially worshipped by Suraseni, an Indian people . . . where there are two great cities Methora (Mathura) and Clisobra (Krishnapura) and a navigable river – the Jabores (Yamuna).

And the cults of the Indian Heracles and Dionysus included frenzied dance rituals with phallic connotations. The Indian Dionysus (Fig. 40) has satyr-like *Ganas* around him, half human, half animal, and the

dark hued Heracles of Methora (Fig. 41) is surrounded by fair girls who run in frenzy to him, to dance on hearing his flute.

This analogy took the form of myth. The Greeks who primarily knew about the Dionysian rituals, tried to explain similar Indian phenomena in their own way. Taking a familiar route, from the known to the unknown, the Greek myth-making faculty brought Dionysus to India to teach the locals the theatrical arts. And being a deity, how could he come after Alexander.

In fact Dionysus is a universal phenomenon, a gay, boisterous, uninhibited nature spirit that took different forms in different cultures and civilizations at different times and manifested itself through different cults and rituals. Comparing the Dionysian rituals in Egypt and Greece, Herodotus writes:

> . . . The Egyptian method of celebrating the festival of Dionysus is much the same as the Greek except that the Egyptians have no choric dance. Instead of the phallus they have puppets about eighteen inches high, the genitals of these figures are made almost as big as the rest of their bodies and they are pulled up and down by strings as the women carry them around the villages. Flute leads the procession and the women who follow sing hymn to Dionysus . . .

In many parts of India *Holi* (Figs. 71, 72), an ancient spring festival associated with the fertility cult, is celebrated more or less in the same manner with lots of singing, dancing, vulgar speech and drinking. Straw-puppets are made with appended phallus which are manipulated by a string. In north Karnataka such puppets are called *Bittappa*, and they are suspended from a very high pole buried in a prominent place in the village. *Bihu* is another festival associated with the fertility cult in which erotic songs are sung and young girls and boys dance with provocative movements. In Orissa the *Raja* festival denotes the menstruation period of mother earth after which sowing operations begin. Frenzied *Deodhani* dances are performed in the *Nata Mandir* of goddess Kamakhya's temple near Gauhati. It is one of the ancient *Yoni-Tirthas* in India, associated with the *Shakta* cult.

Madana Mahotsava, *Vasantotsava*, *Kama Mahotsava* are somewhat sophisticated forms of same ancient festivals with phallic connotations, which abound in dance and music. The eighth century poet Damodaragupta in his *Kuttanimatam* has described the *Kusumayudha Parva* in which girls liberated by drinking are shown dancing and even using obscene speech. These seasonal festivals preserved the tradition of dance and music and contributed to the subsequent development of theatre.

The history of phallic cults in India dates back to the Mesolithic period as is evident from the cave painting of the period. We find phallic worship in the ancient Indus civilization also. Numerous phallic stones and ring-stones have been excavated at different sites along with figurines of mother goddesses. The cult of the ithyphallic deity was in vogue, who may have been worshipped with dance and music. The nude copper figurine of a dancer may have represented a dancing girl associated with the cult. A gray limestone torso of a male dancer comes from Harappa and is known as the *Nataraja*. There are clear indications to show that the statuette must have been originally ithyphallic. In a later period we find sculptures of the ithyphallic *Nataraja* adorning various temples of Orissa including that of Vetala (Fig. 43). Many terracotta figurines indicate the existence of nude cultic dances prevalent at the time.

Though the Rig Veda disapproves the phallic cults, Shisnadeva and his followers, with their dance and music, made inroads into many Vedic rituals. In the *Ashvamedha Yajna*, the horse is strangled to death while the queens performing the *Yajna* dance around it. Then the chief queen sleeps with the dead horse for a night under the cover of a mantle. Woman-horse copulation is depicted in panels sculpted on the Khajuraho temple. The priests and their female partners then exchange vulgar words suggestive of the sexual act. Many scholars feel that the chief priest must have been originally sleeping with the chief queen. Dancing and music form part of the ritual.

Another interesting Vedic ritual with phallic connotations again abounding in dance and music is *Mahavrata*. It is celebrated with drums, songs, playing on the lyre and other musical festivities. A Hetaira—Pushchali—exchanges ritual abuses with a *brahmacharin*.

Even mass copulation is performed to ensure fertility, and beautiful girls with pitchers full of water on their heads dance around the sacrificial fire.

A very interesting song occurs in the *Taittiriya Samhita* indicating the existence of fertility cults and their association with the theatrical arts. It says:

> Yoke the plough, stretch apart the yokes
> Here sow in the womb made ready for seed
> Through our song be there audience with profit
> for us may the ripe grain be brought low by
> the sickle . . .

It seems to be a song sung by a group visiting the fields at the time of sowing and harvesting to delight and encourage the farmers. They are also expecting a generous remuneration from the audiences assembled to witness their show. The terms like 'yoking the plough', 'sowing the seeds' of course have a double meaning.

The ancient cult of *Yakshas* and *Yakshis* (Fig. 44), the deities of fertility and vegetation, is Dionysian in many ways. They are pleased by the offerings of wine, flowers, incense and music. The charming *Yakshis* are sculpted in dancing poses on the early Buddhist monuments of Sanchi and Bharhut. There is a very interesting piece of sculpture in the Mathura Museum in which *Yaksha* king Kubera is shown drinking wine in the company of lovely *Yakshis* who are offering him the drink (Fig. 45). The *Yaksha* shrines were always haunted by actors, dancers, rope-walkers, wrestlers, boxers, jesters, jumpers, pole dancers (*mankhas*), pipers, lute players and minstrels. In the Tamil classic, *Jivaka Chintamani*, occurs a mention of a play performed before a *Yaksha* image. This cult of fertility deities is pre-Vedic in origin. A steatite plaque (Fig. 46) depicting bacchanal rituals associated with the ancient cult of the mother goddess was found at Rajgir near Patna. Belonging to *c.* 3rd century B.C., it shows ritual drinking and dancing by a man and a woman. The man is shown offering a cup of wine to the woman. In the next scene he is seen singing and playing on a musical instrument while the woman dances by his side. Some scholars have identified the man as priest or the devotee

of the mother goddess standing nearby and the girl as a *Devadasi*- a temple girl. This clearly shows that drinking, singing, playing on musical instruments and dancing were included in cultic rituals from ancient times in India. Like dancing and singing the offering of five Ms—Wine, Meat, Fish, Rice and Copulation— is supposed to please the deities. A later Tantra text, *Kaulavalinirnay*, states: *Makarapanchakam devi devatapreetidayakam.* Similar popular cults included dancing, music and wine as a part of their rituals.

Similar cults existed in Greece in which dance and music predominated. The Eleusinian mysteries associated with the cult of the deity of agriculture, Demeter, are worth mentioning. Writing about it Pierre S. Depasta states:

> . . . presumably fasting and ritual purification in the sea were taking place, before a long procession moved along the Sacred Way from Athens twelve miles northwest to Eleusis. Then followed a rudimentary dramatic spectacle enacted in the square theatre of that ancient city . . . These seasonal festivals were held throughout the Greek and Roman worlds in effective regard. Cicero said: 'They help man to live with joy and die with hope.'

Likewise the festivals and rituals associated with the cults of Shiva and Krishna (whom the Greeks identified with Dionysus and Heracles respectively) are full of dance and music. The *Pashupata Sutra* of Lakulisha enjoins the devotees to sing and dance with abandon and also make love in public. *Hasita* (loud laughter), *gita* (singing songs to the glory of Shiva according to the Gandharva Shastra), *nritya* (dancing) and *hudukkar* (roaring like a bull) constitute the *vidhi* or ritual worship of Shiva. Making obscene gestures at the sight of beautiful women is called *sringaran*, behaving against social norms is *avitatkaran*, and making meaningless vulgar speech is *avitadbhashan.* These things are prescribed for the devotees. The devotees are also supposed to carry a phallic symbol signifying Pashupati Shiva. In the theatre hall, enjoins the *Natyashastra*, the *bhutasanghas*—dancing groups of Shiva's attendants - should be worshipped with raw meat and wines of different kinds. According to Indian tradition it is Shiva who embellished the dramatic performance with dance.

The *Ras* mysteries (Fig. 47) associated with the dark hued cowherd Krishna are also archaic in theiro rigin. Bhasa, who was a contemporary of Megasthenes, in his play, *Balacharita*, mentions it under the name *Hallisaka*. On a full-moon night this esoteric dance is performed on the banks of the Yamuna in full secrecy, and Krishna is the only male among the dancers. Magasthenes, as we have seen earlier, knew about the cult and the region in which it was mainly practised. It seems that some of the Greeks were so fascinated by the Bhagavata cult that they adopted it. At Besnagar, a Greek ambassador of king Antialkidas to the court of king Bhagabhadra—Helidoros by name—erected a commemorative pillar in honour of Vasudeva-Krishna. In an inscription on the pillar (Fig. 48) Helidoros calls himself a Bhagavata, a devotee of Vasudeva-Krishna. The monolith pillar dates back to the second century B.C., at least three centuries before Arrian wrote his *Indika*. Panini refers to the temples of Krishna (Keshava) and Balarama (Rama) humming with various kinds of musical instruments on festive occasions. The later works like *Nayadhammakaha* and *Rayapaseniya* which preserve the information of many ancient traditions, speak about the festivals held in the honour of Krishna—the *Mukundamaha*—full of dance, music and theatrical entertainment.

The myth of the Dionysian invasion of India and his teaching the theatrical arts to the local population is dismissed by the ancient Greek writers themselves as 'unworthy of belief'. Strabo, Greek historian and geographer of the first century B.C., not only refutes the myth recorded by Megasthenes, but goes to the extent of saying that it was actually the Western countries who were indebted to India and her rich musical tradition. He says:

> From its melody and rhythm all Thracian music has been considered to be Asiatic, and those writers who have consecrated the whole of Asia to Dionysus as far as India derive the greater part of music from there.

If we are to believe Herodotus, it was from Egypt that the Dionysian cult, along with its phallic procession, was brought to Greece by Melampus, the son of Amytheon. Modern scholars like T.R. Glover believe that the god Dionysus appears from India, at all events from Asia and Thrace. All these observations again confirm our contention

that the fertility cults were prevalent all over the ancient world, and their magico-religious rituals included dance and music. The festivities associated with these cults and their presiding deities, may it be Dionysus in Greece or Krishna and Shiva in India, contributed significantly to the development of theatre in their spheres of influence.

The Dionysian cultic practices resemble Indian Tantric rituals and other rituals connected with the fertility cult. The running away of women from their homes to dance in the honour of Dionysus in the deep woods reminds us of the *gopis* who ran to Krishna on the full-moon day of *Sharada Ritu* on hearing his flute, to dance the *Ras* with him. We get the glimpses of esoteric rituals of the Dionysian cult in the play of Euripides, *The Bacchae.* King Pentheus says in anger:

> . . . women leaving home to frisk
> in mock ecstasies among the thickets
> of the mountain, dancing in honour of the latest
> divinity, a certain Dionysus, whoever he may be:
> In their midst stand bowls brimming with wine.
> And then, one by one, the women wander off
> to hidden nooks where they serve the lusts of men.
> Priestesses of Bacchus they claim they are . . .

The Puranas, including the Bhagavata, proclaim that though Krishna danced with *Parakiyas,* neither he nor the girls became impure by the otherwise socially unacceptable act. On the contrary, through the divine contact their sins were burnt to ashes. A similar pronouncement is made by Teiresias in the play. He says:

> Dionysus does not, I admit, compel a woman
> to be chaste always and in every case
> it is her character and nature that keeps
> a woman chaste. But even in the rites of
> Dionysus the chaste woman will not be corrupted.

These similarities do not necessarily mean that *Ras* dances were derived from the cult of Dionysus or that Dionysus was in essence an Indian or Asian deity. They developed independently in different regions in ancient times. However the scholars who observed these

similarities started thinking about mutual influences, and in the process, started debating about who first influenced whom.

The theatrical traditions of Greece and India originated and developed independent of each other on quite different lines. However one cannot rule out the possibility of their coming into contact with each other after the invasion of India by Alexander the Great. But it seems that the point of contact was not potent enough to spark off mutual influence. Indo-Greek association turned out to be most fruitful in the fields of plastic arts and architecture. If we have to believe Persian sources, the nephew of Aristotle sent him most perfect system of logic which he came across in India. But nothing significant happened in the field of theatre because of this association. Whatever meagre evidence of mutual association is available we shall now try to locate.

Wherever Greeks went they carried with them their theatrical tradition. The well-known Hellenic writer and biographer Plutarch (*c.* 46-120 A.D.) informs us about the enactment of plays of Euripides and Sophocles at Susa, an ancient city of Persia. There is evidence to indicate that Sophoclean plays may have reached Gandhara also. A fragment of a vase was found near Peshawar, which, though locally manufactured, much resembled the Megarian vases of the third and second centuries B.C. in material and design. J.H. Marshall who studied the fragment writes:

> . . . the third piece is the most interesting of all. On it are depicted three figures—in the middle is a powerfully built and bearded man, to his right a young girl whom he is clutching by her garment while she strives to release herself from his grasp; to his left is a youth around whose shoulders the man's left arm is thrown and who is supplicating him with hands uplifted to his breast.
>
> We cannot, I think, be wrong in recognising in it the familiar scene from 'Antigone' where Haemon is supplicating his father Kreon for the life of his affianced bride Antigone.

Dramatic incidences of the kind from Greek plays were

frequently depicted on Megarian vases. Perhaps it was not an uncommon thing for the plays themselves to be reproduced among the Greeks of Northern India.

— *JRAS*, 1908-9, pp. 1060-61

Though the conclusion of Marshall is quite logical and probably true, we do not at present have any other concrete evidence of the time supporting his contention.

The great Sanskrit grammarian Panini (*c*. 7th-5th century B.C.) who hailed from the Gandhara region and has mentioned ancient Indian manual for actors, *Natasutras*, speaks about *Yavani Lipi*, the Greek script, more than a century before the advent of Alexander. In the plays of Bhasa and Kalidasa, *Yavana* women appear as a part of a king's entourage. In his play *Malavikagnimitra*, Kalidasa mentions the fierce battle that took place between the forces of Prince Agnimitra and Vasumitra and the Yavana cavalry on the south bank of the river Sindhu, because one of the Greek cavalry men tried to capture the *Ashvamedha* horse. Scholars have established the historicity of the incident.

The theme of the eighth century play by Vishakhadatta, *Mudrarakshasa*, is based on early Maurya history in which Arya Chanakya, the mentor and chief counsellor of Emperor Chandragupta, is the hero. Viradhagupta, mentioning the siege and capture of the capital of the Nanda kingdom, Pataliputra, by Chandragupta, states that the Mauryan army contained *Yavana* soldiers. It is believed that the ally of Chandragupta who was killed after making love to *Vishangana*, the poison girl, and referred to in the play as Parvataka, is none else but King Porus who had the distinction of fighting with Alexander the Great on the banks of the Jhelum.

Yavanas are mentioned by Bharata in his *Natyashastra*. He says that like Shakas, Pahlavas (Parthians) and Vahlikas (Bahlikas) the *Yavanas* should be shown fair (*gaura*) of complexion while representing them on the stage. But, despite close cultural and political association, in not a single classical Sanskrit play a significant Greek character is portrayed.

However, in the *Bhana Padatadikam*, written by Mahakavi Shymalik in the early fifth century, occurs a beautiful description of a *Yavana* courtesan settled in the prosperous city of Ujjayini. The name of this charming girl is given as Karpoorturishtha. On seeing her Vita says:

> And who is this charming girl? O, she is none other than Yavani Karpoorturishtha, beloved of my dear friend and Shardulavarma's son—Varahadas!
>
> Holding with three fingers she raises the wine cup to the moon. On her cheeks are reflected shining moon-shaped ear-rings which she is trying to push back by her other hand. The rays of the beautiful rings are falling on her smooth shoulders in an arc, looking as if the moon itself has rested there.
>
> The beautiful Yavani with eyes like that of Chakora bird is pushing back her hair by the nails of her slender fingers while looking at her face into the goblet full of wine. Her Madhuka flower-like fair and delicate cheeks have become pink because of the wine she is drinking. Thinking it to be rouge she is in vain trying to rub it off.
>
> And O, Yavani and Ganika, monkey and dancer, Malav and lecher, singer and ass are synonymous, possessing the same qualities. Definitely the Lord Brahma is great in pairing off these things!
>
> Certainly Yavani and Malav are an appropriate pair—made for each other in every respect. The Malav in company with the Yavani looks like the Khadira tree embraced by the Atmagupta creeper or the Nimba tree encircled by the Patola creeper.
>
> I know her, but no, I will not dare speak to her. Who would like to listen to her language full of unfamiliar consonants which she utters like a shrieking female monkey, trying to explain its meaning by gesticulations? I should better move from here!

The *Yavana ganika* (Fig. 49) was a common sight in India under the Gupta rule. The Vita has graphically described her mode of holding the wine goblet, the custom of raising it to the moon goddess who is considered to be a protectress of women, her fair colour and her language with unfamiliar consonants. In Gandhara many crescent-shaped ear-rings are found which were worn by *Yavana* girls. It was also a practice to pin the garment worn by a girl with a brooch at the shoulder. This perhaps is what Vita poetically described as the moon resting on her shoulders, the brooch being moon-shaped.

Yavana Ganikas were so numerous that the words *Yavani* and *ganika* became almost synonymous according to the statement of Vita. There is ample evidence to indicate that beautiful *Yavana* girls were actually exported to India by enterprising slave traders. Early Greek records state that 'singing girls' or 'flute girls' were shipped to India. Written in the first century of the Christian era, the book *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, described as the 'only ancient mariner's manual of the coasts of India that is still in existence', lists among popular Greek merchandise 'singing boys' and 'beautiful maidens' along with costly silverware and fine wine.

Ganikas used to act in plays. It is evident from the *Arthashastra* of Kautilya that *ganikas* were trained in the theatrical arts and it was considered the king's duty to appoint a teacher for them. In Bhasa's play, *Charudattam*, beautiful *ganika* Vasantasena (Fig. 50) is described as 'educated in the art of stage appearance and expert in voice modulation'. The tradition continued in the Gupta period also. In the *Bhana Ubhayabhisarika* written by Vararuchi, we find *ganika* Madanasena presenting a musical opera in the temple of Bhagavan Vishnu. The same work records the staging of an opera, *Purandara Vijaya*, by *ganika* Priyangusena and Devadatta in the palace of King Mahendraditya. Priyangusena is described as an expert in four types of acting, thirty-two types of hand-gestures, eighteen types of eye movements, six types of positions and three types of rhythms. In the list of sixty-four arts *ganikas* are expected to learn theatrical arts like singing, dancing, playing on musical instruments, dress and make-up and stage presentation of dramatic stories are mentioned.

In *Kuttanimatam Kavyam* by Damodaragupta there is an elaborate

description of *ganikas* staging the first act of the play *Ratnavali* by Sriharsha, the seventh century king, who was also a dramatist, in the temple of Kashi Vishveshwara. In the Bayana inscription of Chitralekha it is mentioned that she arranged a dramatic performance of *ganikas* 'whose eyes were like the petals of lotus flowers, whose hips were heavy and whose faces were like the moon' in the Vishnu temple constructed by her.

In ancient India *ganikas* were not merely taken to be a means of sexual gratification, they were also custodians of various fine arts. It is actually this institution which preserved and nurtured the Indian theatrical heritage and tradition. There used to be a small theatre hall, *ranga*, attached to the house of a *ganika*, well furnished with cosy seats, *pithikas*, with comfortable back-rests. According to *Kuttanimatam*, it was here that she used to receive rich *sreshthis* and *vanikas* to entertain them with dance and drama.

The beautiful *Yavana* 'flute girls' (Fig. 51) or 'singing girls' adopting the profession of *ganika* may have also been entertaining people at their establishments with the performance of dance and drama as was the tradition. As *ganikas* like Karpoorturishtha are seen speaking in their own language, they might have been also presenting in the *Ranga*, attached to their houses, dances and dramas peculiar to their own country. They probably exhibited Greek or Greco-Roman dance forms and small dramatic skits before their audiences. The establishments of *Yavana ganikas* in a way may have acted as centres for the spread of Greco-Roman theatrical arts. However it is very difficult to assess the extent of their influence on local theatrical traditions in the absence of concrete and sufficient evidence. Were these *Yavana ganikas* invited to play a part in Indian plays or present *Sangitakas* of their own land? We do not know. But such a possibility cannot be ruled out.

The use of the 'chorus' is peculiar to classical Greek theatre. In fact Greek theatre itself evolved out of choral singing performed as a part of Dionysian festivities. Around 560 B.C., Thespis for the first time introduced an actor impersonating a character, adding new dimensions to the format of choral singing and dance. This initiated the process of dramatisation of the chorus. Aeschylus, who is considered the father of Greek tragedy, introduced the second actor and

the credit of bringing a third actor on the scene about 467 B.C. goes to Sophocles. However the Greeks retained the chorus as a part of drama and delegated to it many dramatic functions.

Different Greek dramatists used the chorus in their plays in different ways, but in general, it performs the following functions—relating the social or historical background of the central theme, introducing the characters entering the orchestra, describing off-stage action and correlating different scenes presented on the stage in a neat dramatic sequence, commenting upon the scenes taking place on the stage and interpreting them, underlining their significance. At an earlier stage, the leader of the chorus, *coryphaeus*, used to give a brief account of the play in his prologue. He also sometimes entered into dramatic dialogue with the actor present on the stage.

In classical Sanskrit theatre we see the *Sutradhar* speaking about the play to be performed in the opening scene, but after his introductory remarks he disappears from the scene never to appear again. There is, of course, no chorus in Sanskrit drama. But in the first act of *Urubhagam*, Bhasa effectively uses a chorus that reminds us of Greek theatre. Here three soldiers form a chorus. At the outset they speak together, then each soldier speaks individually, then again they join and speak together. This sequence is followed throughout the scene. They describe the off-stage action—Kurukshetra war. But the chorus do not remain on the stage throughout the play as in Greek dramatic performances. After describing off-stage happenings they move out and do not appear again.

In Patanjali's *Mahabhashya* three modes of presenting the Krishna story of *Kansa Vadham* are mentioned. It is either presented by actors on the stage, or narrated dramatically by picture-showman with the help of paintings, or sung by *granthikas* by forming two groups, each painting their faces in different colours. If we accept the interpretation of Norvin Hein that it is a one single performance and the word *chitra* does not refer to paintings shown by picture-showmen but denotes *chitrabhinaya* described by Bharata, very interesting possibilities arise.

We know that in Greek dramatic performances sometimes the

chorus breaks into two units, 'vocalising responsively'. If we slightly alter the sequence of Patanjali's passage the following picture emerges which is akin to this practice. The scene opens with the *granthikas* appearing on the scene, dancing and singing. Dancing is not new to the *granthikas* who are now known as *kathaks*, the narrators of stories. The *kathaks* dance and sing while narrating the story, thus preserving the old art of *granthikas*. After entering the arena they break up into two groups. One group calls itself *Kansabhaktas* and paint their faces red or wear red masks. Another group calls itself *Vasudevabhaktas* who paint their faces black or wear black masks. They start a dialogue. With this in the background, enter the actors, *Shobhanikas*, impersonating different characters, enacting the episode of *Kansa Vadha* in the *chitrabhinaya* style aided by the chorus. This very much resembles the performance of classical Greek drama but we must not jump to any conclusion on the basis of such superfluous resemblances. This interpretation suggests a remote possibility of mutual influence, as Indian folk theatre moves on the same lines as ancient Greek theatre.

It is significant to note that there are many basic similarities in the style of presentation of a classical Greek play and an Indian folk play. In both cases the chorus appears on the scene and performs the same dramatic functions, and remains on the stage up to the end of the play. Let us take Assamese folk theatre, *Ankia Nat*, for comparison. In *Ankia Nat*, the *Sutradhar*, leader of the chorus (Fig. 52), enters the arena singing and dancing. In his opening speech he speaks about the play. Like *Coryphaeus* he dances and sings solo for quite some time. Then starts the enactment of the story proper, which in the Greek theatre is termed as 'episode' and 'stasimon'. After the play is over, the chorus in *Ankia Nat* leaves the stage dancing and singing, which in Greek term may be called 'exodus'. However the members of the *Ankia Nat* chorus do not wear masks, though some demonic characters use them.

The evolution of *Ankia Nat* also resembles the development of Greek drama in many respects. Structurally *Ankia Nat* evolved out of choral singing associated with the ancient serpent cult of the region. This choral group was comprised of Oja, its leader, and the Palis, his associates (Fig. 53). They danced and sang songs in praise of goddess Manasa. To this was soon added the second actor, Daina Pali, who acted as an interlocutor of Oja. Subsequently, more

actors were introduced to impersonate the characters of the myth when Vaishnavas adopted this semi-dramatic form. In the process Oja became *Sutradhar* and the Palis his chorus. Thus began *Ankia Nat*, the Vaishnava one-act play of Assam.

The Yakshagana theatre (Fig. 54) of Karnataka evolved in the same way. A group of choral singers under a leader used to sing songs in the temple hall and narrate through it mythological stories. It was known as *tala-maddale*. Subsequently some members of the chorus started impersonating the characters of the myth, each singing out the songs related to the character he is impersonating. The leader of the party became *sutradhar*, turning the remaining members of the group into his chorus.

These folk theatre forms are quite modern in their origin but they have certainly assimilated the older dramatic techniques and traditions. Some scholars believe that classical Sanskrit theatre originated in the choral singing of ancient epic poems like the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. But later, Sanskrit theatre dispensed with the chorus and adopted other devices like *Arthopakshepakas* (link scenes) speaking from *nepathya* (green-room) etc. to do the work of the chorus. But the chorus remained on the folk stage performing the same functions as that of the Greek chorus. Of course, in composition, the Greek chorus and the chorus of Indian folk stage differ substantially, but the underlying concept is the same in both cases. This does not in any way suggest any Greek influence on Indian folk dramatic forms. It, however, indicates parallel development in different regions in different periods of history.

Cave Theatre

Some scholars point at the cave theatre at Ramgarh hills in Madhya Pradesh and the beautiful square amphitheatre excavated at Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh as evidence of Greek influence on Indian theatre architecture. At the entrance of the Sitabenga cave there are 'a row of rock-cut benches arranged in the shape of a crescent' which T. Bloch thinks are for the audience to watch dramatic performances held in front of the cave. Beglar thinks that these steps just lead to the cave. Describing the interior of the cave Bloch writes:

> The interior forms an oblong 46′ by 24′. Along three sides run broad rock-cut seats two and half feet high and seven feet wide slightly terraced by lowering the front a few inches. Spectators would be seated along the broad benches and the dancing party would perform in front . . .

There is nothing Greek about the structure of the cave which has been described by Bloch as an 'Indian theatre of third century B.C.' There are two very interesting inscriptions, one in the Sitabenga and the other in the nearby Jogimara caves indicating that the steps have been used for reciting poems, singing songs and performing dances. The Sitabenga cave inscription reads:

1. *Adipayanti hrdayam sabhava-garu kavayo eratayam*
2. *Duley vasamtiya hasavanubhute kadaspantam ebam alam ga(ta)*

Poets venerable by nature kindle the heart, who . . .
At the spring festival of the vernal full moon, when frolics and music abound, people thus (?) tie (around their necks garlands) thick with jasmine flowers.

On the roof of the Jogimara cave there are ancient paintings of great significance. The cave inscription reads:

Sutanuka nama
devadasikyi
sutanuka nama/devadasikyi
tam kamayitha ba!(a) na seye
devadine nama lupadakhe

Sutanuka by name
a devadasi
Sutanuka by name, a devadasi
The excellent among young men loved her
Devadinna by name skilled in sculpture.

The association of dancing girls and poets with these caves is clear indication of there having been some kind of a cave theatre. There are

many other caves with benches carved all along the interior walls which were apparently used as places of recreation. The tradition goes back to the *Mahabharata.* In the *Adiparva* of the epic we find Arjuna and Krishna visiting the mountain Raivataka to watch the performance of *nata* and *nartaka.* In ancient Buddhist literature there are descriptions of *Giragga Samajja,* dramatic performances held on the hills for the recreation of the people. As we have already seen in the *Chullavagga* there is a mention of *Giragga Samajja,* a dramatic festival on the mountain top.

In Buddhist *Vinaya* texts we come across the 'wicked and shameless' monks Assagi and Punabbasu and their followers who indulged in dancing, singing and music. These residents of Kita hill used to visit the theatre, probably a cave theatre, and flirt with the dancing girls by saying:

> *Rangamajjhe pi sanghati pattharitva nacchakim evan vadanti – egha bhagini nacchassu ti; nalatikam pi denti . . .*
>
> 'O sister, come, I have spread my robe here for you. Come, dance on it', they used to say to dancing girls in the cave theatre of Kita hill.

Nasik cave inscription of Vasisthiputra Pulumayi and the Hathigumpha inscription of Kalinga Emperor Kharavela refer to dramatic festivals held at cave theatres. The Ranigumpha (Fig. 55) situated in the Udayagiri hill is a magnificent double-storeyed cave with a spacious courtyard in front of it. The audience used to sit in the pillared galleries of the first floor, leaving the ground-floor cells for actors to prepare themselves for the show. On the left-hand projection of the cave there is a spacious throne carved out of stone, to accommodate dignitaries like the king and his family or the high priest attending the performance. The auditorium is fully covered and not open like the Greek amphitheatres on hill sides are. There are beautiful carvings depicting folk tales and dancing scenes on both the floors.

In one of the panels sculpted between the cell-doors opening into the galleries, the story of King Dushyanta's first encounter with

Shakuntala is related. Another panel depicts a war scene and the abduction of a beautiful girl by a man. It is the abduction dance of the ancient Jong tribe of Orissa. When the bridegroom's party reach the house of the bride they perform a war dance and at the end carry away the girl as a war trophy. In this cave we find sculpted one of the oldest extant dance scenes in stone. We do not find such cave theatres anywhere in Greece. In fact the practice of using caves as theatres dates back to prehistoric times. According to the *Natya-shastra* the early plays were produced by Bharata in the Himalayas.

Though Indian cave theatres bear no resemblance to Greek amphitheatres, there is a striking similarity between early Greek temporary wood gallery theatres and the *Samajja mandal* theatres described in early Buddhist literature including the Jataka stories. We know of an accident that occurred in Athens about 499 B.C. when wooden stands on which spectators were seated suddenly gave way during a theatrical performance. Hence, some scholars believe that early Greek performances might have been on level ground, probably within a city, where some form of scaffolding for seating would have been necessary.

According to the Jataka tales the wandering troupes of actors used to visit places and perform in the *Samajja mandal.* In the *Kanavera Jataka*, *ganika* Sama thus speaks to the *natas*:

> *tumhe gamanigamrajadhaniya gantava*
> *samajjan katva samajjamandale pathanam*
> *eva imam gitam gayeyyatha . . .*

> O actors there is no place that you do not visit. You visit the village, the city, and the capital, and present dramatic performances in the Samajja mandal. There you sing and deliver speech.

This *Samajja mandal*, as is evident from the meaning of the words, was a circular arena on level ground. According to the evidence recorded in the Jataka tales, many a time, around the arena, a wooden scaffolding used to be raised, tier above tier, for audiences (Fig. 56). Dramatic performance is described in the *Vidurapandita Jataka* thus:

> *Chakkaticakke manchatimanche bandhimsu*
>
> Crowds are gathered here of men and women, see the seats, tier above tier.

These types of theatres, constructed in India around 600 B.C., very much resemble the early Greek wooden structures built around the acting arena on level ground to accommodate the audience. This simple principle—a circular dance floor with seats around it in tiers—was adopted by the temple architects of Karnataka while constructing the *Navaranga* halls in temples like those at Halebid and Belur (Figs. 57 and 58). Sometimes *Samajja mandal* was a raised round structure of bricks and mortar. The earliest surviving *Samajja mandal* which is locally known as *Chauthara* can be seen in front of the Ananta cave in the Khandagiri hills near Bhuvaneshvar in Orissa. A round raised open air platform for dancers to perform is seen in the Brihadeshvar temple at Tanjore. It is known as the *Kuruvanji* platform. As is evident from the frieze carved in the Ranigumpha cave (Fig. 55) and the one kept in the Lucknow Museum, both belonging to the second century B.C., the early Indian theatre was a simple structure—four pillars with a roof above. This small *Ranga* or canopy was used by the performers while the audience sat in front of it in the open. Such a *Ranga* is shown in one of the Ajanta paintings depicting the *Mahajanaka Jataka* (Fig. 59). In the *Rajatarangini* of Kalhana (12th century) a very interesting simile occurs: A troupe of soldiers dispersing in all directions is compared with a crowd of spectators in the theatre caught in the rain.

More sophisticated forms of theatres are described by Bharata in his *Natyashastra*. These were regular well constructed theatres even in the modern sense of the term. Theatre halls were also attached to the kings' palaces, the temples (Figs. 60 and 61) and the residences of *ganikas*. In the ancient Tamil classic *Shilappadikaram* there occurs a beautiful description of a theatre:

> The stage was eight kols in length, seven kols in breadth, and one kol in height. It has two appropriate doors. The plank platform placed over it was four kols in width.

> Over the stage were placed painted pictures of the Bhutam for praise and worship. The graceful lamp illuminating the stage was so placed that the pillars did not cast shadows.
>
> The single screen and the screen between the two pillars to the right of the stage beside the overhanging curtain were well manipulated by ropes. Added to these was a canopy painted with many beautiful pictures, from which were hanging loosely garlands of pearls and other ornaments.
>
> Such was the novel and attractive appearance which the stage presented.

This goes to show that theatres in ancient India did not conform to a single model. From the sophisticated, well-constructed permanent theatres of Bharata to the simple open-air *Samajja mandal* with its wooden scaffolding raised around a circular acting arena, many types of constructions were in existence. These do not in any way show any Greek influence.

However, in a way, we can say that the Greek and Indian theatres started from similar premises in their respective regions, though architecturally they developed on different lines. The base of both the theatres from which their development started was a circular arena marked out for theatrical performances. In ancient Indian literature it was called *Samajja mandal* while the Greeks called it an 'orchestra'. The oldest known orchestra with a diameter of seventy-eight feet was excavated near the old temple of Dionysus at Athens. The plays of Aeschylus were staged in this orchestra. The present theatre of Dionysus is a later construction and its orchestra is a bit removed from the original one. But it covers some part of the original orchestra.

For spectators, both in ancient India and Greece, wooden seats were provided tier above tier. The Greeks made their orchestra near hill slopes so that they could arrange the seats in an ascending order on the slopes. However literary evidence indicates that in India free-standing scaffoldings used to be erected on the level ground by the side of the *Samajja mandal.* In ancient Buddhist literature the term *Giri-Samajja* is used, but in the absence of any supporting evidence we cannot inter-

pret it as a hill-side theatre. It may be a cave theatre like the Sitabenga or Ranigumpha cave theatres. In Greece, around the beginning of the fifth century, wooden seats were replaced with stone ones.

Greek drama originated in dithyrambs sung by a chorus of dancing, singing devotees of Dionysus, the folk deity of wine and vegetation. Gradually the first, second and third actors were added to it, which gave the chorus a definite dramatic form. These actors started enacting different roles in the play with the chorus in attendance. A need was felt to house actors, their make-up material, masks and costumes just adjacent to the performing arena. Hence a kind of hut was erected near the orchestra which came to be known as the skene. Three doors were provided to the skene for exit and entry of the actors. The skene and orchestra formed one unit. The skene wooden platform was raised about one foot above the level of the orchestra to form a stage. Now the chorus remained in the orchestra while the actors mainly operated from the stage.

In India also the need to accommodate the actors was felt and for them a small hut was erected near the *Samajja mandal* and it came to be known as *nepathya.* However here the whole of *Samajja mandal* was converted into the stage formed on unit. The *nepathya* was provided with two doors for the entry and exit of actors. The *nepathya*, the *ranga* (stage) and the auditorium with seats raised tier above tier were accommodated in a well-constructed building. But in Greece the theatre remained an open-air construction. The auditorium, orchestra, the stage had no roof above them. It was only the skene building which was well covered from above.

This is a very general type of comparison done without going into architectural details of the respective theatres. The main needs of the theatre are the same everywhere. Hence despite architectural differences there are some basic similarities. Our knowledge of ancient Indian theatre is based mainly on literary evidences, however in Greece and in the area under its cultural influence ancient theatre buildings belonging to the sixth, fifth and fourth centuries B.C. still stand majestically, though in ruins.

We can say the rectangular hill-side amphitheatre excavated in 1954 at Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh betrays Greco-Roman influence (Fig. 62). This amphitheatre was constructed in the reign of the second Ikshvaku king, Maharaja Madhariputra Sri Vira-Purisadatta, the son of the founder of the Vijayapuri empire, Ghantamula I. Vira-Purisadatta was a powerful king who ruled over the Krishna valley in the third century A.D. The theatrical arts flourished under his generous patronage. The prosperous kingdom had trade contacts with foreign countries which brought immense riches to the region. Before proceeding with the description of the amphitheatre constructed under the patronage of this king let us first, in brief, survey the Greco-Roman relationship with the southern peninsula that had developed particularly during Ashokan times.

Megasthenes speaks of the Pandyan kingdom of south India in his account. He has recorded a strange myth about the origin of this kingdom. Writing about the Indian Heracles of Methora, worshipped by the Surasenis, Megasthenes states:

> (Heracles had) only one daughter. Her name was Pandaea, and the country where she was born and which Heracles gave her to rule is called Pandaea after her.

Scholars have identified Heracles of Methora with Krishna. Hence according to Greek record it was Krishna's daughter who established the Pandyan dynasty. Whatever may be the case, one thing is certain that the Greeks were aware of this south Indian kingdom.

It is interesting to note that the first missionary deputed by the Emperor Ashoka to spread Buddhism in the southern peninsula was a Greek named Dhammarakkhita. In many caves in the Western Ghats the names of *Yavanas* are found inscribed. One of the beautiful Nasik caves bears the name of Yonaka Indragnidatta from Dattamitra (Demetria). We have already mentioned the Garuda Pillar erected by a Greek envoy at Besnagar. It seems that some of the Greeks who came to India adopted local religions and settled in the country.

From ancient times India has carried on maritime trade with the Mediterranean world as is evident from the fully equipped dockyard

excavated at Lothal. The *Baveru Jataka* tells us an interesting story of an Indian merchant who took with him to Baveru (Babylon) a famous Indian bird the peacock. Says the Jataka: '*Yada cha sara-sampanno moro baverumagata*'. In the early centuries of the Christian era or even earlier Romans and Romanised Greeks came to South India as maritime traders. Scholars believe that the adventurous Greeks were, in fact, mostly contingents of traders that landed on Indian shores. George Woodcock states:

> The stages by which sea-borne commerce with the West established itself along the coasts of India are marked by finds of Roman rather than Greek coins, and temples of Augustus were built in places on the Malabar coast where the merchants and marines gathered. But it would be erroneous, to assume on the strength of this evidence that the Romans themselves took any part in this trade, except to lend the prestige of the emperor's name or to act as sleeping partners in commercial ventures. The names of shipmasters on this Indian route that have survived are all Greek.

Through these Roman and Greek traders, influence of the Hellenistic culture reached southern India. Many artifices of Greco-Roman origin have been found at differents ites excavated by archaeologist's spade. Kaveripattanam, the ancient port-capital of the early Cholas, was known in the Tamil classics as the emporium of the Roman traders. A Roman copper coin was found at Velliyan Irruppu, which literally means the 'abode of white men'. M.N. Deshpande thinks that it was a Roman colony. He also points at a very interesting description of a *Yavana* lamp in a tamil *Sangam* classic called the *Ten Idylls*. It says:

> *Yavanar iyarriya vinaya man pavai*
> *Kai-yendu ai ahal niraya ney sorindu*
> *paru-un-thin koli iya kuru-u-ttalai no mir eri*

> The lamp was made by *Yavanas*, was of fine workmanship, was made in the form of woman. In the lamp bowl held by her, ghee was poured to the brim, a thick wick was set in it and it was lighted and it burned with an erect flame.

The *Yavana* merchants carried back with them to their home markets fine Indian textiles and various spices including pepper which is described as 'the passion of the *Yavanas*'. Rich Roman women were so fond of these Indian luxuries that it started telling upon the gold reserves of the Roman Empire. At Pompeii, which was situated at the foot of Vesuvius and was destroyed in the volcanic eruption in A.D. 79, a beautifully carved ivory mirror handle of Indian origin was excavated. It is in the form of a nude *Yakshi* figure with two attendants standing by her side (Fig. 63).

Indian ambassadors visited the court of Roman Emperor Augustus with suitable presents in the year 20 B.C. Which Indian king they represented is still uncertain, but most historians believe that they were sent by Pandion or the Pandya kings of Madura. Shri Somalay in his book *Folklore of Tamilnadu* informs us that the story of a Pandya king sending two emissaries to the court of Augustus is sometimes depicted in folk drama. One person from the party burnt himself alive at Athens. The Indian's tomb at Athens bore the epitaph: 'Here lies Zarmanochegas, an Indian from Bargosa, who immortalized India.' Plutarch refers to this monument which was known to the Athenians. This goes to show that Greco-Romans were active in the coastal regions of India even before the advent of the Christian era.

The Greco-Roman influence reached Nagarjunakonda also. In this context Deshpande mentions two Roman Aurei, one of Tiberius (A.D. 16-37) and another of Faustina the Elder, mother-in-law of Marcus Aurelius and queen of Antonius Pius, issued after A.D. 141, which were excavated at Nagarjunakonda. The most interesting archaeological find is a crude representation of Dionysus in stone. He has a small, pointed, goat-like beard, is semi-nude and carries a drinking horn in his hand. Near him is placed a barrel of wine. He holds a single piece of cloth in Greco-Roman style carelessly near his waist. The presence of the merry Greek god of wine, vegetation and the theatrical arts, at a place where a hill-side amphitheatre is located, is quite significant and suggestive.

A report published in *Indian Archaeology: 1954-55*, about the discovery of a quadrangular arena with brick galleries around at Nagarjunakonda, says:

> The next site, VIIA, was the most important of recent excavations. It revealed a temple of Hariti, juxtaposed on the contours of the hill. To reach the temple one had to go up the hill through a quadrangle 54′6″×45′ with arrangements on its four sides for brick galleries edged with cuddapah slabs . . . A circular abacus part of a column was situated right at the centre of the quadrangle. One of the stone benches bore the triratna and the bow and arrow mark. Another stone bench had an inscription on it reading *Kama-Shara*, the arrow of love. The shrine was approached through this wide enclosure by a flight of steps leading to the top of hill . . . Also was found in this arena an inscribed pillar referring to putting up a perpetual endowment (*akhaya-nini*) on the occasion of some *utsava* or festival (Fig. 62).

It was really a very important discovery. The brick-built amphitheatre with tiered galleries rising one above other was built around a plane quadrangular orchestra or dancing arena. It was provided with a drainage system and a lamp-post in the centre of the arena. It seems to have been built by the artisans' guild who used the bow and arrow as their symbol. On either side of the flight of steps leading towards the temple were enclosed areas to seat very important persons.

This amphitheatre seems to be very definitely connected with the Hariti temple on the hill-top. The festival referred to in an inscription on the pillar found in the arena must have been held in honour of Hariti in the amphitheatre along with dance, music and drama. Hariti is a Buddhist deity and the amphitheatre's Buddhist connection is apparent from the *triratna* symbol inscribed on it. This reminds us of the magnificent Roman theatre built by Pompey the Great in 55 B.C. with the temple of Venus over it (Fig. 64). Speaking about it a Carthaginian theologian, Tertullian (*c.* 160-*c.* 230), in his *De Spectaculis*, remarks: 'The theatre is especially the shrine of Venus. In fact it was in this manner that this sort of performance came up in the world . . . Pompey the Great, less only than his own theatre, when he had built up the stronghold of every vice, fearing that the censors might one day cast reflections on his memory, placed over it a temple of Venus, "under which", he said, "we have put rows of seats for the shows".' In a way we can say the same thing about the Nagarjunakonda amphitheatre. Here

rows of seats were put under the temple of Hariti for the performance of plays. Of course here the temple is not a part of the amphitheatre in the sense that the temple of Venus was a part of Pompey's theatre. However, the amphitheatre below is connected with the Hariti temple at the top of the hill by a flight of steps.

As dramatic performances were held in honour of different deities in Greece, Rome and India, there has existed a relationship between temples and theatres in all the three nations since early times. A theatre historian makes a very interesting remark in this context: 'The dancing ground precedes the temple.' In Greece the theatres at Athens, Delphi, Delos, Epidauros (Fig. 65), Cyrene and Syracuse are located near temples. But in Roman theatres the temple became the part of the theatre itself. In India temples at many places, including those at Konarak, Khajuraho, Bhuvaneshvar and Puri, have been provided with *nata mandirs* or dancing halls. Though all these theatres are based on entirely different architectural concepts and belong to different periods of history, their association with the temple is a common factor. This is the same relationship that exists between the Hariti temple and the amphitheatre at Nagarjunakonda; in fact the path to the temple passes through the amphitheatre itself.

Scholars who deny that this amphitheatre is constructed on the classical Greek model, point at its rectangular size and say that Greek theatres were semicircular. However, the concept of a rectangular theatre was not unknown to the Greeks. Speaking of early Greek wooden theatres, Allardyce Nicoll writes:

> . . . the pre-Aeschylean wooden theatres which recent investigations suggest were constructed in a trapezoidal and not in a circular plan. Here tiers of benches set at angles were arranged so that they almost surrounded a dancing place, may be also trapezoidal in form, known as the orchestra.

The ancient court theatre at Phaestos, Crete, from which the Greek theatre evolved is also somewhat rectangular in plan. Recently, near Athens, a rectangular amphitheatre belonging to about the second century B.C. has been excavated. Mysteries associated with the cult of Greek fertility goddess, Demeter, were enacted at Eleusis in a square

theatre. It is interesting to note that according to some scholars the Greek Demeter and the Indian Hariti are one and the same. George Woodcock writes:

> As Buddhism changed it came into contact with other religions of many kinds, and when Mahayanism had developed its broader theology the tendency was to accept local deities into the Buddhist pantheon . . . Demeter, the earth mother of the Greeks, is transformed into Hariti, an ancient Indian fertility goddess with a taste for human infants who was converted by Buddha and became a popular figure of the Mahayanist pantheon.

The chief apostle of Mahayana Buddhism was Nagarjuna after whom the place was named. It became a great centre of Mahayanism. Can we really say that Demeter was admitted to the Mahayana pantheon along with her mysteries and the square theatre associated with them, and hence we see the temple of Hariti and a rectangular amphitheatre at Nagarjunakonda? This may be stretching our imagination a bit far, but one is certainly struck by the similarities.

Though Buddha the recluse kept himself away from the theatrical arts, expelled *bhikkus* who indulged in them and even turned a beautiful dancer into a hideous creature when she tried to entice the *bhikkus*, his disciples used the theatrical medium to spread his message and acquaint the people with his life. In the *Avadanashataka* appears the story of a *natacharya* of Dakshinapatha who once came to a capital city named Shobhavati with his troupe. The king ordered him to stage a play on Buddhist theme—*Bauddham Natakam*. Accordingly the *natacharya* gave a performance. He himself appeared on the stage as Buddha while other actors as monks—*Natacharya swayameva budhaveshavatirnah parishista nata bhikshuveshena.* Much pleased, the king offered the *natacharya* and other prominent actors gifts and money.

In Turfan, fragments of three Buddhist plays were found, one of which is *Sariputraprakarana* by Ashvaghosha, son of Suvarnakshi. According to the accounts of the Chinese travellers, professional actors were brought to the Buddhist monasteries including those at Mathura

to enact Buddhist stories. There is enough inscriptional evidence to support this information. A beautiful dancer, Karpurashree, was attached to the Buddhist Mahavihara at Solanpura. A Chinese pilgrim, I-tsing (A.D. 671-95), speaking about Harsha's play *Nagananda* says: 'King Shiladitya versified the story of Bodhisattva Jimutavahana (Chinese: 'Cloud Borne') who surrendered himself in the place of a Naga. This version was set to music (literally, string and pipe). He had it performed by a band of actors accompanied by dancing and acting and thus popularised it in his times.'

The tradition of presenting plays on Buddhist themes still lingers in the Lama monasteries of the Himalayan region. The masked actors enact the myth signifying the victory of good over evil. It is just possible that in the Nagarjunakonda amphitheatre such plays were performed. However, there is no concrete evidence to show that the *Yavanas* who influenced the structure of the amphitheatre had a hand in the play production also. We know of many *Yavana* converts to Buddhism. We also know that they used their skill in sculpture and architecture in the service of their new faith which led to emergence of the Gandhara school of art. Did something like that happen in the field of theatre? Before trying to answer this question let us first compare the Greek and Indian theories about the evolution of the theatre.

Art as Imitation

Plato (427-347 B.C.) and Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) are the most prominent among the Greek philosophers who deeply influenced Western thought. It was Plato who first spoke about art being an imitation, the theory which his learned disciple Aristotle develops substantially. But in Plato's *Utopia* the poor imitator has no place. He says:

> When any of these pantomimic gentlemen, who are so clever that they can imitate anything, comes to us, and makes a proposal to exhibit himself and his poetry, we will fall down and worship him as a sweet and holy and wonderul being; but we must also inform him that in our state such as he are not permitted to exist; the law will not allow them. And so when we have anointed him with myrrh, and set a garland upon his head, we shall send him away to another city.

Aristotle is not so harsh towards the theatrical arts, though he admits their imitative nature. The Aristotelian concept of imitation has been very well explained by Gilbert Murray who states: 'The poet who was "maker" of the Fall of Troy clearly did not make the real Fall of Troy. He made an imitation Fall of Troy. An artist who "painted Pericles" really "made an imitation Pericles by means of shapes and colours".' Likewise we can say that the actors who performed the myth of Bacchus really made an imitation of his acts by means of rhythm, language, melody, verse. Elucidating his theory Aristotle says: 'The imitators may represent the whole story dramatically, as though they were actually doing the things described.'

To understand him properly, let us quote from his famous work, *The Poetics*, written about 330 B.C. Speaking of the nature of different arts he says:

> Imitation is natural to man . . . And it is also natural for all to delight in works of imitation.
>
> Epic poetry and tragedy, as also comedy, dithyrambic poetry, and most flute playing and lyre playing, are all, viewed as a whole, modes of imitation. Rhythm alone, without harmony, is the means in the dancer's imitations; for even he, by rhythms of his attitudes, may represent men's characters, as well as what they do and suffer . . . There are certain other arts which combine all the means enumerated, rhythms, melody, and verse, *e.g.* dithyrambic and nomic poetry, tragedy and comedy . . .
>
> The objects the imitator represents are actions. Tragedy is essentially an imitation not of persons but of action and life, of happiness and misery. All human happiness or misery take the form of action. The agents represented must be either above our own level of goodness or beneath it, or just such as we are.

In India we find the mention of works on drama and histrionics at least since the fifth century B.C. Panini speaks of the *Natasutras* written by Shilalin and Krishashva. The works unfortunately are lost

to posterity along with the works of ancient dramatists like Dattila and Kohala. However, we are fortunate enough that Bharata's *Natyashastra*, an encyclopaedic work covering all major aspects of the theatrical arts, written around the second century B.C., has survived the onslaughts of time. His defination of drama and his theory about its origin have a basic similarity with the Aristotelian concept. Says Bharata:

> The drama is a representation of the states (*bhavanu-keertanam*) of the three worlds. The drama is mimicry of action and conducts of people (*loka-vruttanukaranam*), which is rich in various emotions (*nanabhavosampannam*) and which depicts different situations (*nanavasthantaratmakam*). This will relate to actions (*karma*) of men good, bad and medium (*uttam, adham, madhyam*). And when human nature with its joys and sorrows is depicted by means of representation through gestures and like it is called drama.

The imitation of action or the *karma* of men is, according to both, the source of drama. These men can be above our own level of goodness, that is *uttama*, or beneath, that is *adhama*, or just such as we are, that is *madhyama*. It is interesting to note how close are the theories of Bharata and Aristotle regarding the basics of the theatrical arts though they develop them on different lines. Being the products of two different civilisations and cultural milieu they are bound to differ, but both of them take human action *karma* and its imitation as a source of dramatic art. This does not indicate any direct or indirect influence of Aristotle on Bharata. In his definition Bharata is echoing the opinions of traditional teachers of the theatrical arts in India.

Our original question was: Did Indo-Greek association in the field of drama result in something like the Gandhara school of art, to which both the civilisations contributed ? Speaking about Gandhara art the great Indologist Ananda Coomaraswamy writes: 'It may be described from one point of view as representing an eastward extension of Hellenistic civilisation, mixed with Iranian element, from another a westward extension of Indian culture in western garb.' We have only one but an extremely significant evidence of such association in the field of theatre in the form of a farce written in Greek and Kannada languages. As in the Gandhara art, in this farce too the influences of

Greek and Indian theatrical traditions are quite apparent.

In Egypt, in the year 1899, intensive excavation activities were undertaken under the auspices of the Biblical Archaeological Association at Oxyrhynchus to further Biblical research. During the excavation a large collection of ancient manuscripts inscribed on papyrus sheet were unearthed. Tall papyrus trees were common in Egypt. The thin strips cut from its plinth were used as writing material in ancient times. Scholars like P. Grenfell and Arthur S. Hunt translated the papyri material and published it as *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri Part III.* Among the material published is a Greek farce with passages in Indian language.

Dr R. Shama Shastri was the first Indian scholar who came across this significant find. He wrote an elaborate article on the farce in the *Mysore Archaeological Report for 1926* and showed that the Indian language in the play is none other than Kannada. Well-known historian B.A. Saletore made a thorough examination of the farce and recorded his observation as to the location of the farce, etc. in his book, *Ancient Karnataka.*

The farce written in *c.* second century or earlier, is very interesting. A beautiful Greek girl, Charition, falls into the hands of the *Nayaka* of Malpe, an ancient sea-port of Karnataka. Probably she was sold to him as a 'flute girl' by the traders mentioned in *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea.* She is dedicated by the *Nayaka* as a temple girl to the temple of the Moon goddess. Meanwhile, her brother with a search party including a buffoon arrives at Malpe after crossing the Indian Ocean. They serve intoxicating white wine to the *Nayaka* and his party, who agree to release the girl on payment of some ransom. While rejoicing, the *Nayaka* gets completely drunk, and the Greeks escape with the girl.

Before further analysing let us first quote the text of the play with Dr. Saletore's English rendering of Kannada Lines. The characters of the play are A—Charition, B—Buffoon, All—King's people, C—Brother of Charition, D—Captain of the ship, F, G, H—Greek characters, King—*Nayaka* of Malpe called Basileus.

A Tentative Reconstruction of the Greek Farce with Old Kannada Passages

B	:	Lady Charition, rejoice with me at my escape!
A	:	Great are the gods.
B	:	What gods, fool(?)
A	:	Cease fellow.
D	:	Wait for me here and I will go and bring the ship to anchor.
A	:	Go? For see, here come their women from the chase.
B	:	Oh! What huge bows they have!
A Woman	:	Kraunou? (Shall we shoot?)[1]
Another	:	Lalle (Warning her).[2]
Another	:	Laitalianta Lalle (Lalle asks you to wait? Is it not so?)[3]
Another	:	Kotakos an ab, Iosara (Lo! Take the string of hemp. Give the arrow!)[4]
B	:	Hail!
All	:	Laspathia (The Buffoon! Ah!)[5]
B	:	Ah! Lady help!
A	:	Alemaka! (Alem akka – Is he (the proper) person (to be shot), Sister?)[6]
All	:	Alemaka (Alla emmakka – No, our sister!)[7]
B	:	By Athena, there is no (harm) from us.
A	:	Wretch, they took you for an enemy and nearly shot you.
B	:	I am always in misfortune. Will you them . . . to the river Psolichus?
A	:	As you like (Drums) (B . . . porade) (Against the name of A is the letter B and the word porade. If it is meant as a word spoken by B, then meaning seems to be 'Start then'. But if applied to A, the meaning probably is 'I am starting, ready!')
All	:	Minei (Shall we take our bath?)
F	:	Lady Charition, I see the wind is rising, so that we may cross the Indian ocean and escape. So enter and fetch your property, and if you can, carry off one of the offerings to the goddess.
A	:	Prudence, fellow! Those in need of salvation must not accompany their petitions to the gods with sacrilege.

For how will the gods listen to men who try to win mercy with wickedness?

B : Don't you touch? I will fetch it.

D : Fetch your own things then.

A : I do not need them either, but only to see my father's face.

D : Enter, then; and do you serve them . . . and give them their wine strong, for here they come.

B : I think they are the daughters of swine; these too I will get rid of (Drums . . .)

All : Ai Arminthi (Drums.) (Have all of you taken your bath?)

B : They also have run away to the Psolichus.

C : Yes; but let us get ready, if we are to escape.

B : Lady Charition, get ready, if you can take under your arm one of the offerings to the goddess.

A : Hush! Those in need of salvation must not accompany their petitions to the gods with sacrilege. For how will they listen to the prayers of those who are about to gain mercy by wickedness? The property of the goddess must remain sacred.

B : Don't you touch; I will carry it.

A : Don't be silly, but if they come, serve them the wine neat.

B : But if they will not drink it so?

C : Fool, in these regions wine is not for sale. Consequently if they get hold of this kind of thing, they will drink it neat against their will(?)

B : I'll serve them lees and all.

C : Here they come, having bathed . . . (Drums)

King : Brathis (Cause to be served in plenty.)[8]

All : Brathis.

B : What do they say?

C : Let us draw lots for the shares, he says.

B : Yes, let us.

King : Stoukepairomellokoroke (Pour a little into his hand slowly.)[9]

B : Back, accursed wretch.

King : Brathis (Drums) Bere konzei damun petrekio paktei

kortames bere ialer ode pomenzi petrekiodam ut kinze paxei zebes lolo bia bradis kottos.
(Give me the precious drink. Why did you put down your cup before some more was served? Take a portion! Serve a little, brother! Thinking there will be no more to be served must you have put down your cups. Is your desire for dinner so little? Would you not eat or drink? Fear! Take a little!)[10]

All : Kottos (Give a little).

B : May you be kicked by 'kottos'.

King : Zopit (Drums) (Ah! Excellent!)[11]

B : What do they say?

C : Give them a drink, quick.

B : Are you afraid to speak then? Hail, thou whose days prosper! (Drums)

King : Zeisoukormosede (Drums) (Ah! Take by deceit.)[12]

B : Ah! Not if I know it.

C : It is watery, put in some wine (Much drumming).

G : Skalmakata bapteiragoumi (The sin (of drinking) which you have not committed till now, may be ended this day only!) (In other words, empty the cups.)[13]

H : Tougòummi nekelekethro (Take once again. Why did you get up?)[14]

G : Eitou belle trachoupterugoumi (How pure (white) is the wine! Let it be finished once for all!)[15]

B : Ah! None of your disgusting ways! Stop! (Drums) Ah! What are you doing?

H : Trachountermana. (It is honour to partake of the (juice of) grapes!)[16]

G : Boullitikaloumbai platagouıda bi . . . (You will be very happy this year. Take a share lovingly.)[17]

B : Apuleukasar (Drums) (Ah! It will be sour! Get away!)

King : Chorbonorbothorba
toumionaxiz despit platagoulda bi . . . Sesosrachis (Drums) oradosatur ouamesare sumpsaradara ei iada . . .
(One shows boiled rice, another who sees the husk in it, runs away out of the country. Take a share lovingly.

Sesa! Protect! Show your love lovingly! Oh! Umeshvara! Is this the door of smsara?[18]

B : Martha marithouma edmaimai maitho thamouna martha marithouma (Drums) . . . tun
(We have found out a medicine! Wherever the greatness of this magic spreads strongly, silence is produced. Lady! We have found out a medicine!)[19]

King : Malpinaik ouroukoukoub (n?) i karako . . . ra (Take Malpe Nayaka (referring to himself) into the house.)[20]

All : Aba! (Exclamatory word)

King : Zebede za biligidoumba (Ha! Do not do so! He will order you to be shot!)[21]

All : Aba oun (Oh! Truly!) He will protect you (if you act according to his wishes!).

King : Pan oum bretikateman ouman brethououeni (Oh! Lady, how will you aspire for honour unless the drinking people (ourselves) hold you (in) high (esteem?))[22]

All : Panoumbretikate manouam brethou oueni parakoum bretikatema noum bret ououeni olusadizaparda piskou piskate man arei man ridaou oupatei . . . a (five drummings) (Oh! . . . esteem? You will forfeit the happiness of this and the other world without yielding to the will of the king (*i.e.*, if you do not yield to the will of the king) Submit! Protect us (by becoming our queen). Do you understand us? Do you not approve?)[23]

King : A boundless barbaric dance. I lead, O goddess moon. With wild measure and barbaric step; Ye Indian chiefs, bring the drum of mystic sound. The frenzied Seric step. (Much drumming and beating)

All : Orkis. (Make him lie down! (lest he should fall and hurt himself) . . .)[24]

B : What do they say again?

C : He says, dance.

B : Just like living men (Drums).

C : Throw him down and bind him with the sacred girdles. (Much drumming. Finale.)

B : They are now heavy with drink.

C : Good! Charition, come out here.

A : Come, brother, quickly; is all ready?

C : Yes, all; the boat is at the anchor close by; why do you linger? Helmsman, I bid you bring the ship alongside here at once.

D : Wait till I give him the word.

B : Are you talking again, you bungler? Let us leave him outside to kiss the ship's bottom.

C : Are you all aboard?

All : Aboard.

A : O Unhappy me! A great trembling seizes my wretched body. Be propitious, Lady goddess! Save thy handmaiden!

At some places Dr Shastri differs with Dr Saletore in interpreting the Kannada passages in the farce. Dr Shastri's version is given below:

1. Does he call?
2. (He is) coaxing.
3. He is coaxing by saying (le and le) a word usually used in addressing a woman.
4. An insulting word from the buffoon to the maiden (Greek girl).
5. Well, beat him!

6 & 7. Not my sister. She says, 'It is not an insulting sound, my sister.'

8. Cause them to play at dice, each separately. The casting of a die is to ascertain whether the player should have his share of feast or gold or not.
9. For the boiled pulses, rush and for the purpose of getting the sauce.
10. Play separately. Why do you cringe before it is separately served to you? Cause each of them to play each having counted his own (share) and each casting the die loved for the odd (number) and chop off the whole (of the sauce).
11. King means that the die fell with odd number, when he cast it.
12. Have it poured into your vessel by cheating.
13. O son, come and give the wine. For the ransom agreed upon, give them (wine).
14. You ask them why. Raise up (your cups).
15. Is it over? Then the white wine; give them (wine) for the ransom agreed upon.

16. Wine is the ransom.
17. Come, you drink this good wine. You get life.
18. One who desires will appear, he will give you a place. Having left the country of Axih (Oxyrhyncus) you will get life. O Shiva bestow care on us. Kindly show love to us. Go to the river of the place called Sumpsara or Umapsara.
19. Obscure, probably imitation of the sound of drum by buffoon.
20. O chief of Malpi, the rest is obscure.
21. Come eat this for a dish of a feast.
22. Without the distribution of drink to us separately, you divide shares of ransom, O madam!
23. Without setting aside our blessings you divide the shares of ransom, O madam. Unable us. We are to win your regard, you may go away with our free consent. Who are there like ourselves? Is this to your satisfaction?
24. Support him (the king). This seems to have been said when the king was stumbling due to intoxication. The word seems to have been mistaken for a Greek word of almost similar pronunciation and interpreted it to mean dance.

Dr Shastri explains the play as follows:

"One of the women forming the king's party asks another whether the buffoon is calling. Another woman replies that he is coaxing her. A third woman adds that he is not only coaxing but also addressing her by using the word 'le' 'le' which is however vulgar term of address. Accordingly, a fourth woman says that the word is an insult to Kodagusu, the Greek lady. Meanwhile the buffoon uses the word, 'Charite, hail' which the Indian women mistake for his coaxing call to Charition whose Indian name seems to have been 'Chaireite or Charemma' (line 16). This along with his use of the vulgar term 'le' irritates the womenfolk. Forthwith they take up their bows and arrows to shoot him saying "well, strike him". The buffoon is frightened and appeals to Charition for help. Accordingly she interferes saying that he was not insulting. The womenfolk draw the attention of each other among themselves by repeating the phrase 'not, my elder sister'. Then the buffoon asks the lady to go to the river Psolichus for being ready to escape, as previously arranged. She starts and the king's womenfolk consider that she is going to the river for a

bath (*miua*) and ask such among themselves as have not yet bathed to accompany the lady to the river. Meanwhile one of the Greeks asks the lady to carry off some of the jewels of the Hindu Goddess whom she seems to have feigned to be worshipping in order to escape from the overtures of the king for marriage. She refuses to take any of the jewels of the Goddess and says that her seeing her father's face is dearer to her than the jewelry of the Goddess. Now the Captain of the ship draws attention of the buffoon to the approaching party of the king and asks him whether he will take up the task of serving them wine to make them drunk and senseless so as to give the Greeks an opportunity to escape unscathed. The buffoon consents and hopes to wait for the departure of all the women of the second batch also (daughters of swine) to the river. But he doubts whether the Indians would ever drink such a thing as wine, though as C says it is rare in India.

Meanwhile the king and his party assemble on the spot after taking their bath with a view to take up their respective shares as determined by casting the dice (Pakte-pagade) marked with odd and even numbers, any odd number (*Besa*) being taken as a sign for winning the share. Accordingly the king asks the buffoon to cause the chiefs to cast the dice to determine their respective shares and tells the chiefs to go for their refreshment (*Mellogara*). But the chiefs hurry on for their shares without casting the die and receive a rebuff from the buffoon. The king intervenes and remonstrates with them for their hurry to take up the share before it is duly allotted (Hoyyada mun) and asks why they impatiently cringed for their shares, though they had hoped to win their shares by casting the dice, each declaring the amount of his due (*Ponnenisi*) and tells the buffoon to cause each of the chiefs to cast the dice, regarding the odd number as a sign for success. Then the king's party ask the buffoon to go on with his work and the buffoon not understanding their speech insults them in Greek, by saying that they might receive a kick from Kottos. Immediately the king throws the dice and seeing their fall with an odd number says "Ho bit—bildattu—fell", thereby claiming his share. But failing to understand what the king said, buffoon asks C to explain it to him. C, however, tells the buffoon to quickly give them without caring to interpret the king's speech. And the buffoon asks him whether he was afraid to interpret it and proceeds to serve them wine, by exclaiming

"Hail thou whose days prosper".

Being now interrupted from their proceeding to cast the dice and take up their shares the party go to partake of the wine readily brought before them. The king tells his party that so far as wine is concerned there is no allotment of a fixed quantity and that therefore they may avail themselves of any quantity of wine, even by deception (*mosade*) But the buffoon who seems to have been somehow or other familiar with the word *mosa* says that he will be careful so as not to be deceived.

Immediately the buffoon serves the wine. But seeing its diluted appearance, C tells the buffoon to give them strong wine, while A says to the buffoon to give them wine as a kind of ransom agreed upon. (Terake avam i and trakvun teramana).

Neither the king nor his party seem to have caught the meaning of what G & H said. But the buffoon who was in the conspiracy seems to have caught the significance of it and being disgusted with their careless talk, asked them to stop their talk, warning them of its danger. Still being perhaps sure of the effects of wine on the king and his party H goes on saying that wine is the ransom. But G, however, diverts the attention of the king by telling him to drink wine and prosper (*bal taguldapai*) and the buffoon says that he is ready to give even the sour sediment of wine contained at the bottom of the vessel.

Though the king promised to release the Greek lady by taking ransom, he exhibits now, perhaps due to the effects of wine, his love to Charition by saying that a man, *i.e.*, himself who desires to have her is at her disposal and asks whether she will like to prosper in his country after she has long left Oxyrhyncus. He appeals to Malpinaik and Seo to make the lady return from the river. The king's speech here is incoherent, due to the drinking of wine and is obscure.

The king at last talks to himself thinking of the lady who is gone to the temple and asks her to divide at least the ransom though she has neither distributed the wine nor received the blessings of the chiefs by distributing the ransom and says that as he has failed to win her regard, she may leave him behind and depart, obtaining his free consent.

Then the Indians fully drunk begin to dance with their heads reeling. At this juncture the Greeks take to their legs and embark on their ship in the river."

The play seems to be a piece of historical fiction based on facts. Malpe was a flourishing harbour through which ancient Tuluvas traded with the western world. Roman coins of Augustus Caesar (63 B.C.-A.D. 14) were excavated at Candravalli. Dr Saletore further points out that it is no surprise that the harbour of such importance had a *Nayaka*, as epigraphical evidence proves that cities like Udayavara and Kolalagiri had *Nayakas*.

In fact, *Yavana* traders were not new to south India. We find them mentioned in many south Indian classics. *Shilappadhikaram* mentions warehouses near the harbour, abodes of *Yavanas* and sailors coming from distant lands to Pukar. It also mentions that '*Chera* king penetrated the golden region of the high mountain in the fertile kingdom of the barbarous *Yavanas*'. Some scholars contend that this refers to Greek kingdom *Yavana Nadu* in Indus region. The *Shilappadhikaram* also mentions *Yavana* swordsmen, and according to scholars like Prof Dikshitar, this is an obvious reference to the Greek mercenary soldiers in the employ of Tamil kings. Beautiful 'flute girls' whom the *Yavana* traders brought to India along with fine wine and silverware, were much in demand in royal circles. Charition, the heroine of the play, seems to be one of these girls.

According to Dr Saletore the scene of action of the play must be somewhere near Malpe, most probably the great ancient Shaivite centre called Odabhandeshvara which means Ship-vessel-Isvara. The region in which the temple is located is still known as Kanaka which means forest. From this forest the women in the farce could have emerged after their hunting expedition. Dr Saletore rejects the suggestion of Govinda Pai that the capital city of Udayavara itself was the scene of action. He says: 'We cannot conceive of an Alupa King falling into the hand of a party of foreigners in Udayavara itself or in the temple near that city. The ruins of the palace of Alupas lie so close to the sea-shore that it is improbable that the drinking bout and its consequences could have happened there without the people of the city knowing it.' Odabhandeshvara, which is famous for its Balarama

temple, is about one mile from Malpe, and was originally a Shaivite centre. It was surrounded by a forest with a small river passing through it, all of which make it the more likely site of the event.

The scene is laid in the premises of the temple of the Moon goddess which stands in the background. Some of the Greek plays also have this temple background. For instance the play *Ion* opens before the temple of Apollo at Delphi. The scene of the play *The Suppliant Women* is laid in the temple of Demeter, at Eleusis, near Athens. However, in the Indian context, the reference to the temple of the Moon goddess is perplexing, because, according to Indian mythology, the Moon is a male deity. Dr Saletore conjectures that the Greeks might have confused the image of the Buddhist goddess Tara with an image of the Moon goddess. The king in the play refers to her as Selene. Worshipped on the days of the new and the full moon, the Greek Moon goddess Selene is represented as driving a chariot drawn by two horses. She is sometimes seen riding a bull or a mule or a ram. Is it possible that the goddess Ganga, perched on the head of a bull-riding Shiva, near the crescent of the moon, is taken by the Greeks as the Moon goddess? It is also interesting to note that like the Moon goddess in Greek mythology in the Indian mythology too, Moon or Soma is the saviour of women. The *Yavana Ganika* in the *Bhana* also holds her cup high to toast the moon. However the evidence indicates that the deity referred to by the Greeks as the Moon goddess seems to be some Indian goddess. Otherwise the jester would not have asked the heroine to steal her jewellery. It may even be a *Yogini* temple as one of the sixty-four *Yoginis* is known as Chandravati. Some of the *Yoginis* have a bull, a horse and a ram as vehicles.

Did the cult of the Moon goddess reach India with the invading Greeks? On a beautiful second century coin of king Kanishka, the Moon goddess Nanaia is depicted. As in the city of Elymais in Persia, there was a magnificent temple of Nanaia-Artemis in the Greek settlement at Susa also. She was the protective deity of the city in whose temple Greeks used to manumit their slaves. In the Greek-Kannada farce also the heroine is freed from the slavery of the Indian king at the temple of Moon goddess Selene. In Greek mythology, Selene is identified with Artemis. It shows that the writer of the farce must have been aware of the custom of releasing slaves at the temple of the Moon goddess.

At the end of the farce the intoxicated king is tied by his own sacred thread. Dr Saletore refers to a sculpture found in a private house near the Ganapati temple at Udayavara, showing the figure of a king wearing the sacred thread. Greek wine was immensely popular among the Indian royalty and on the evidence of *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea*, along with the beautiful girls for royal harems the *Yavana* traders brought wine also to India. So rare was this imported commodity and so crazy were the people about it that a character in the farce, C, says: 'Fool, in these regions wine is not for sale. Consequently if they get hold of this kind of thing, they will drink it neat against their will.' Dr Saletore mentions a later inscription of Kundavarmarasa II, which claims that the king has eradicated the '*sura paan (krato) doso*', the evil of drinking. We do not know if the inscription is referring to the habit of drinking spread by the *Yavana* traders in the region.

It is obvious from the high-flown Greek and corrupt Kannada passages that the farce in all probability might have been written by a Kannada knowing Greek, quite possibly a resident of one of the *Yavana* settlements on the coastal region. It may have fallen into the hands of professional mime companies of Greeks settled in Rome who had been on a visit to India, to entertain the Greek and Greco-Roman settlers there. Probably it was intended for enactment before Kannada knowing *Yavanas* in India. There are less chances of its having been shown before Indians who knew Greek as Indians are ridiculed in the farce. Mimes were well-known for enacting short skits, sometimes no more than hundred lines, depicting interesting episodes including drinking, fighting, love-making, trickery, etc. The Kannada-Greek farce was an ideal skit for them.

The admixture of two languages is another interesting feature of the farce. In classical Greek plays no such thing occurs. In mimes different dialects are used and so also in classical Sanskrit plays. But probably our farce is the only extant example in which two languages of two different countries are used in the same play. But in the history of Indo-Greek association this is not altogether new. Bilingual Greek coins are found in the Gandhara region. Kharoshthi and Brahmi appear on the coins of Greek kings Agathocles (*c.* 180-165 B.C.) and Pantaleon who were brothers and who ruled the region upto

eastern Punjab with their capital at Taxila. It is also interesting to note that on one of their coins an Indian dancer with a flower in her hair is depicted. She is identified as Lakshmi by the scholars. On one of their bronze coins is to be found the earliest representation of Krishna and Balarama. Krishna who wears a diadem, holds a circular, disk-like weapon, the *Chakra* in one hand, and a conch shell in another. Balarama carries his mace and plough. The coins are bilingual Brahmi and Greek. George Woodcock remarks: 'The Greek ruling class in India was effectively bilingual.' Likewise, some Indians knew Greek well. We have already mentioned that Panini refers to the *Yavana* script. Ashoka not only spoke of *Yavanas* in his rock edicts but also got one inscribed in Greek and Aramaic languages. Some scholars go to the extent of saying that as Helen, daughter of Seleucus, was married to Chandragupta, his grandson Ashoka was at least one quarter Greek. There is evidence to prove that Indians knew the Greek language.

W.W. Tarn in his book, *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, refers to the statement of rhetorician Dio Chrysostom that Indians possessed and used a translation of Homer into their own language. However, scholars including Tarn think that Heliodorus at Besnagar knew the *Mahabharata* well. The Greek king Menander wrote in Pali a unique work in the question and answer form known as *Milindapanha*. Some scholars feel that the work, Socratic in form, might have been originally written in Greek. They feel that Nagasena, with whom Menander converses in the book, might have been a Greek convert to Buddhism. Few words were also exchanged between Sanskrit and Greek language which are found in the literary works of both the languages.

In south India also, due to the long association with *Yavana* traders, people may have learnt the Greek tongue. The Greeks in their turn may have learnt Indian languages of the South, including Kannada. The outcome was the farce in Kannada and Greek. The company of professional mimes may have taken up this farce for enactment in India and carried it back certainly as far as Egypt, and probably beyond it, to Greece. Of course these conjectures are, as yet, based on circumstantial evidence.

Masks and Puppets

Masks were an inseparable part of Greek theatrical production. They came to the theatre from ancient Dionysian and other similar cults in the fifth century B.C., and the credit of introducing them for the first time goes to Thespis. Tradition gives the credit of introducing female masks to Phrynichus and the use of painted masks to Aeschylus. In the comedies, masks of animals and birds were used for the Chorus.

The history of masks in India dates back to the Mesolithic times (Figs. 66a to 66g). The ancient cave paintings of the period depict magician-priests wearing animal masks and headgears while performing ritualistic dances. In the Indus Valley excavations we have found small hollow masks indicative of bigger ritualistic masks. At Chirand in Bihar, a terracotta actor's mask belonging to the fourth century B.C. was unearthed by the archaeologist's spade. Bharata also mentions *Pratishirsha* in his *Natyashastra*, and it seems that like Greek masks, these too were full head masks with diadems and appropriate hair styles appended to them. He says:

> Different masks (*Pratishirsha*) are to be used for gods and men according to their habitation, birth and age. In the masks the crowns are of three different kinds . . . Masks of demons, lunatics, ghosts, etc. should have long hair. The head (in the mask) of monks, etc. should be clean shaven.
>
> Ashes or husks of paddy mixed with the paste made of leaves of the Bilva tree. This should be applied on cloth. After the cloth dries, one should pierce holes in it. These holes should be made after dividing the cloth into two equal halves. Likewise masks should be made.

However, in classical Indian theatre the stress being more on facial expression, masks were seldom used. Bharata has devised a very rich system of acting ignoring masks. Moreover in classical and traditional Indian theatre, women enacted female roles, unlike the Greek theatre where male actors acted female roles. Bharata also gives detailed instructions about how to do facial make-up with different colours, taking into consideration the nature of the character to be portrayed.

This does not mean that Indian theatre is devoid of the mask as an actor's prop. Many traditional and folk theatrical forms use masks. For instance, in *Ram Leela*, which is a dramatization of the epic *Ramayana*, a bird mask for Jatayu, a monkey mask for Hanuman, demon masks for characters like Ravana and Shurpanakha, are worn by the actors. In the *Bhagavatmela* plays, mainly associated with the Varadraja Perumal temple at Melatur in Tamil Nadu, a ferocious mask of god Narasimha (Fig. 67) is used while performing the play *Prahlad Charitam*. In *Krishna Attam* plays which are performed in the famous Guruvayur temple in Kerala, characters like *Yama* the god of death, *Brahma* the god of wisdom with four heads, and certain demonic characters wear masks. In many traditional and folk theatre forms an actor wearing the mask of Lord Ganesha appears in the beginning of the play. The most imposing and highly ornate masks are used by actors participating in the processional theatre of Puri, *Sahi Jatra.* A grand spectacle is presented by the actors in masks representing various mythological characters moving in a spectacular procession through the streets of Puri. The *Ankia Nat* of Assam and the *Dashavatar* of Goa also use masks. The villain of the *Dashavatar* play *Sankasur* (Fig. 68) wears a black cloth mask with a red cloth tongue appended to it. This covers his entire body. Though quite recent in origin these theatrical forms seem to have retained the use of masks inherent in ancient Indian theatrical tradition. But in these theatrical forms also, very few characters appear on the stage masked. Only gods with two or more heads, demons and animals use masks but not the main characters of the play. The only exception probably is the *Chau* dances, and the mystery plays enacted in the Buddhist Lama monasteries in the Himalayan regions. Compared to Greek classical theatre, masks remain an insignificant part of theatrical production in India.

Yet another form of entertainment popular in both ancient Greece and India was the puppet theatre. Writing about the art of puppetry in his monograph *The Home of Puppet Play*, Pischel states:

> Xenophen in his symposium makes the puppet player from Syracuse assert that he esteems fools above other men; they being the spectators of his puppets. The puppet player Potheinos was so much run after in Athens that the Arehons

gave up to him the very stage on which Euripides has excited the enthusiasm of the populace.

Xenophon (444-359 B.C.) the Athenian general was the follower of Socrates. His remarks reveal the remarkable popularity of puppet plays and the attitude of the Greek philosophers towards them. It shows that the puppet theatre was a great favourite of the fifth century B.C. Greeks.

Indian puppetry is much older, and Pischel not only admits it, but calls India the home of puppet play. The string-manipulated puppet (Fig. 69: a-b) as a form of entertainment is a legacy of the Indus Civilization. As we have mentioned earlier, many terracotta figurines with detachable limbs which allow vertical movement with the help of strings were excavated at various sites. In the hands of fate, says the ancient Indian epic the *Mahabharata*, man is just like a wooden puppet manipulated by a string, *sutraprota darumayeena yosha.* Madhva describes its mode of manipulation. In his *Brahma-sutra-bhashya* he says that while the manipulator himself remains static, he moves the puppets.

In the *Kamasutra* of Vatsyayana we find some very interesting information about puppets and puppet plays. There is a lot of controversy about the age of Vatsyayana and even his real identity. In one of his verses Vatsyayana mentions Kuntala Satkarni, a Satavahana ruler of the first century B.C. *Kamasutra* is quoted in the works of Kalidasa. This helps us to place him somewhere in the early centuries of the Christian era. The *Kamasutra* reflects the antiquity and the popularity of puppet plays in India.

We learn from the *Kamasutra* that in ancient India, puppets were made of thread (*sutra*), wood (*daru*), animal-horns (*gaval*), elephant-tusk (*gajadanta*), honeycomb wax (*madhucchista*), flour (*pishta*) and clay (*mrinmayi*). To entertain and seduce young women, says Vatsyayana, puppet plays should be organized and enchanting puppets made of material mentioned above should be presented to them.

Apart from the string-manipulated puppets, Vatsyayana mentions puppets with some kind of inbuilt mechanism *yantrani.* With the

help of *yantras* installed in the puppets, animation is given to them, says Yashodhara, the commentator of the *Kamasutra*. The existence of mechanized puppets in ancient India can be proved by many literary references. In the sixth chapter of *Kathasaritsagar*, a compendium of Gunadhya's (*c*. 400-300 B.C.) ancient collection of folk tales in the Paishachi language, mechanized puppets are mentioned. It is related in a story that Asura *Shilpin* Maya's daughter Somaprabha gave as a present to the princess Kalingasena a full basket of wooden mechanical puppets *kasthamayih yantraputrika*. These puppets were fitted with keys for their manipulation. When Kalingasena operated the keys some of the puppets started dancing, while others started relating stories. *Avadanakalpalata* also mentions the dance of mechanized puppets or *yantraputrakaleela*.

But the most interesting form of puppet play, as given in the *Kamasutra*, is the *Panchalanuyanam*—a mixed dramatic form in which a puppet and a human actor act together (Fig. 70). However the term also suggests some kind of *jugalbandi* between a performing puppet and a human actor, the puppet acting first, followed by its imitation by the human actor. Probably, taking cue from the dancing puppet, the human actor delineated the meaning of its symbolic gestures through speech and action. No detailed explanation of the term is given either by the author of the *Kamasutra* or by his famous commentator, Yashodhara. The latter only adds that this type of entertainment was popular in the Mithila region.

We have no evidence to show that there was any point of contact between India and Greece in the realm of puppetry. Though, compared to the Greek art of puppetry, the Indian puppet theatre, and even its derivative, the shadow theatre (Fig. 69c), are much older in origin, we have no concrete evidence to indicate that the art travelled from India to Greece in ancient times. The Greeks borrowed shadow theatre from Turkey only few centuries ago and it is known as 'Karagiosis'. Karagiosis (Fig. 71) and Hadjiavatis are two stock characters of the Greek shadow theatre. Some scholars are of the opinion that via Turkey the Indian shadow theatre reached Greece but again this is just a conjecture.

Parallel Streams

Historians and scholars sometimes presume the possibility of contact between Indian and Greek theatrical arts because it is an indisputable fact that wherever the Greeks went they invariably carried with them their theatrical traditions. There are certain evidences which support this argument. Pointing at the gymnasium and the stadium at Susa and a gymnasium and a theatre at Greek Babylon, Tarn remarks that 'there were Greek polises (in India) and a polis (settlement) of any pretentions without a theatre is unthinkable'. Hence the possibility of flourishing theatrical activity in the Indian regions under the Greeks cannot be ruled out. He further states: 'If there was already a nascent drama in the second century B.C., or at least in the first century, then there must have been contact of some kind between the two arts.' He hastens to add that the contact, as we have seen, was probable; but contact does not necessarily mean influence.

Some interesting similarities between dramatic conventions of ancient India and Greece are worth noting. Dramatic competitions were held at Dionysian festivals in Greece. A jury of ten spectators from among the audience was selected to judge the performances of the plays staged on the occasion. The members of the jury were not necessarily the experts in the field. After judging the plays they used to award the best among the actors and the playwrights. It is evident from the *Natyashastra* some kind of dramatic competitions were in vogue in India also. But it seems that competition was between actors performing in a play rather than between different play productions presented on an occasion. In the *Guttil Jataka* there is a detailed description of a competition between two musicians Guttil and Moosal. In the Kalidasa's play *Malavikagnimitram*, the disciples of two dance teachers are seen competing with each other. Possibly plays were also enacted in a competitive spirit. Bharata has laid down in detail guidelines of judging a play production. He also recommends the formation of a ten member jury but states specifically who will constitute it. An expert in sacrifice, an actor, a prosodist, a grammarian, a king, an archer, a painter, a courtesan, a musician and a king's officer are to be appointed as assessors who will judge the different aspects of the play production. It seems that the flag of honour was awarded to successful actor and not to the playwright.

In the 7th volume of the *Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society* a very interesting theory, connecting an episode in Kalidasa's play *Shakuntalam* and a myth mentioned by the Greek historian Herodotus, is propounded by Surendranath Mujumdar Shastri. King Dushyanta falls in love with the beautiful foster-daughter of sage Kanva and gives her his ring as a token of love when he leaves her. On her way to Dushyanta's kingdom Shakuntala loses the ring in the waters of Shachitirtha where it is swallowed by a fish. Shakuntala fails to produce the ring, the king refuses to accept her. Insulted she leaves the kingdom. After this a fisherman recovers the ring from the fish when he cuts it open. When he tries to sell it, the king's officers intercept him and present the ring to the king. On seeing the ring the king becomes aware of the folly committed by him in driving away helpless Shakuntala. This is the key episode in the play.

The names of Bharata, Daushanta and also Apsara Shakuntala are mentioned in *Shatapatha Brahmana* but the Vedic texts are silent about the love story which is elaborated by the *Mahabharata* in a later period. The same story with a difference appears in the *Katthahari Jataka* in which the ring is mentioned first. Mujumdar Shastri feels that 'the idea of a ring as keepsake sent by a lover to authenticate a message' has been borrowed by Kalidasa from the *Ramayana* in which Hanuman carried the ring of Rama to Sita while she was in Ravana's custody to prove his identity as Rama's messenger. But nowhere does the episode of a fish swallowing the ring appear. Mujumdar Shastri, in this context, refers to the story of Polycrates (532 B.C.), the king of Samos, one of the principal islands of the Aegean sea off the coast of Ionia, recorded by Herodotus. The story runs thus:

> Polycrates, king of Samos, concluded with Amasis, king of Egypt, a treaty of friendship, which the two kings cemented by mutual presents. After this his power and prosperity increased suddenly and he made Samos the mistress of the Aegean sea. Being informed of the great prosperity of Polycrates, Amasis felt uneasy on that account and informed his royal friend that too much prosperity was a thing which did not always have a happy end, and advised him to test his lot by throwing away his most valuable possession. Polycrates, following the advice of his friend, searched among all his

> rarities for something the loss of which would be felt most by him. He fied upon the emerald on his gold ring which he was in the habit of always wearing and which served for his seal. Having resolved to get rid of it, he embarked in a vessel. When he was far out into the sea from his island home, he took the ring off his finger and threw it into the deep sea before the ship's crew and returned to his city. After some five or six days a fisherman having caught a very big fish thought it to be a worthy present for the king. He brought it to the palace of Polycrates and presented it to him. The king was much pleased with the discourse of the fisherman and invited him to dinner. Meanwhile the officers of the kitchen opened the fish, found within it the ring of Polycrates. Polycrates thought it to be a divine miracle and informed Amasis of everything.

Shastri gives a very interesting explanation as to how this Aegean sea legend reached far-off India. Kalidasa mentions *Yavanis*, the girls from Ionia, in his play. *Periplus of the Erythrean Sea* supports the fact that Greek girls were exported to India for the *harem* of local kings. To this we may add that a Bhana play mentions *Yavana Ganikas*. Shastri feels that these *Yavanis* would be the fit persons to introduce folk tales of Ionia and the Aegean sea in India. A myth mentioned by a Greek historian belonging to the fifth century B.C. reaching an Indian playwright of the fourth century A.D., through a girl imported for the king's *harem*, is too farfetched a conclusion. Fishermen finding various things from the stomach of fish caught by them is a common story and for that Kalidasa is not required to take recourse to Herodotus. Though the credibility of Mujumdar Shastri's conclusion is doubtful one cannot deny the cultural influences reaching India through the visiting Greeks who later settled in this country and mingled with the local population. However, it is very difficult to tell with precision which foreign influences were absorbed in the cultural fabric of the country.

Some other writers have also tried to establish that there was Greek influence on Indian playwrights as certain thematic similarities have been found. Tarn has written elaborately about this. He says:

> Certain parallels between Greek and Indian plays have been

put forward, but there is nothing convincing in this respect; human minds, working on the same subject, have a tendency to work on parallel lines. No one, I think, can read a play like *Sakuntala*, which in a less sophisticated age than our own took London by storm as it did Goethe, without realising that he is in a totally different world from anything which he has ever met with in Greek literature. And my second point concerns that same substance. The strongest argument of those who have believed in substantial Greek influence has always been that Kalidasa's plays contain recognition scenes and these were the stock-in-trade of the Athenian writer of comedies, *Menander.* Why Menander should be brought in is obscure to me, for any contact is much more likely to have been with Euripides; even Philostratus knew that much. But in any case the argument is easy to disprove. Ancient civilisations, whatever their merits, usually gave far less individual security than we expect today, and in any country, not only in Greece or India, recognitions of lost wives or daughters were the most obvious of all the material which lay in the hand of the dramatist. We possess an old Peruvian play (and a very good one) called *Apu Ollantay* composed in the reign of the Inca Tupac Yupanqui and written down after the Spanish conquest. That play turns entirely on two recognitions, the first by the imprisoned princess of her lost daughter, and the second, through the child's instrumentality, of the prisoner herself by her husband and her brother the Inca; but the most hardened diffusionist would scarcely suggest that the author, who had never heard of the Old World, was borrowing from Menander.

Moreover, classical Greek dramas are governed by the principle of the unities of time, place and action, of which Indian theatre seldom took any note. The Indian aesthete believed in building up emotions to an artistic level and enjoying them, while their Greek counterparts believed in purging themselves of extreme emotions through an excess of vicarious suffering and passion. Though suffering is shown on the Indian stage, tragedy in the Greek sense of the term was unknown. Classical Indian drama generally tried to avoid violence of passions or actions which made them romantic and sometimes even insipid. In the words of Karl Mantzius:

> Indian drama, like a magic world, unfolds before our eyes a bright sunny landscape of flourishing lianas, sweet-smelling mango trees, soft-flowing rivers, at which light footed gazelles quench their thirst, and on whose banks high palm trees nod their tops, while brown love-seeking maidens play on the lawn and adorn themselves with lotus flowers, admired by the bold eyes of the fairy kings, and protected by the wise admonitions of pious hermits.

Goethe's reaction to the romanticism of Kalidasa is best expressed in the following verse composed by him:

> Would'st thou the flowers of spring and the fruits of autumn,
> Would'st thou what tempts and charms, what fills and nourishes,
> Would'st thou heaven and earth expressed in one name,
> I mention thee Sakuntala, and all is said.

According to the Indian theory of *Karma*, good acts are rewarded with good results and bad acts with bad results. The suffering of good men is a result of sinful acts committed in their previous births. This suffering takes away the effects of their bad acts and paves the way for further enjoyment of the results of their good acts. Hence, whatever suffering a good man will go through, fate will finally favour him. Hence, in the Indian drama a hero who is always depicted as a meritorious person never faces disastrous tragedy though he may pass through intermittent suffering. Even the romantic tragedy of Pururavas that occurs in the *Rig Veda* was corrected in the *Shatapatha Brahmana* with a suitable happy ending, hero uniting with heroine. Victory of good over evil is the recurring theme in Indian art and literature. The fundamental difference between the two approaches is that the Greek tragedy is based on 'undeserved misfortune' as Aristotle sees it, while the *Karma* philosophy being its base Indian theatre depicts 'justice deserved'. Tragedy that befalls a man through his 'vice or depravity' is no tragedy according to the Greeks. In classical Indian theatre, it is only such a person who suffers ultimately. 'Error of judgement' on the part of hero is the source of tragedy in Greek theatre While in Indian plays such an error would be corrected in the end. In *Shakuntalam* the error of judgement committed by Dushyanta in recognizing Shakuntala when she came to his court stands

corrected in the end and they are happily united again. Had he been the hero of Greek tragedy, he would have met with a series of untold miseries and a disastrous end. This is the basic difference in the temperament and the treatment of the two dramatic arts.

Though the possibility of Greek and Indian theatrical traditions coming into some kind of contact cannot be ruled out, it is also true that this contact failed to make any significant impact either way.



Rathayatra

Appendix

As we have seen earlier some of the ancient Greek writers perpetuated the myth of Dionysian invasion of India while some refuted it as fictitious. Arrian speaks of the city of Nysa somewhere between rivers Cophen and Indus which was founded by Dionysus after he had subjugated the Indians. It was situated near the mountain named Meros. He further describes how Alexander on his way visited this city, offered sacrifice to the deity of wine and theatre and how some of his fellow Macedonians even acted as Bacchanals.

Philosopher Apollonius, born in the first century of Christian era at Tyana in Asia Minor, visited India. We come to know from his biography written by Philostratus that he along with one of his friends also visited the city of Nysa and nearby mountain. 'On its summit they found a moderate sized temple of Bacchus; this temple was a circular plot of ground, enclosed by a hedgerow of laurels, vines, and ivy, all of which had been planted by Bacchus himself, and had so grown and intertwined their branches together as to form a roof and walls impervious to wind and rain. In the interior Bacchus had placed his own statue – in the form of an Indian youth.'

He further records an interesting controversy regarding the origin of Bacchus. He states: "Greeks and Hindus are not agreed; for the former assert that the Theban Bacchus with his bacchanals conquered and overran India, and they cite, among other proofs, a discus of Indian silver in the treasury at Delphi, with this inscription: 'Bacchus, Jove and Semele's son, from India to Delphian Apollo.' But of the latter,

the Indians of the Caucasus believe that he was an Assyrian stranger, not unacquainted however with him of Thebes; while those of the Indus and Ganges declare that he was the son of the Indus, and Theban Bacchus was his disciple and imitator."

However, the most interesting and significant in the context of the Indo-Greek farce quoted earlier is the description of Dionysian invasion that occurs in the writings of Polyaenus, a Macedonian settled in Rome in the second century A.D. He states: 'Dionysus in his expedition against Indians gave signal for battle by cymbals and drums instead of the trumpet and by regaling the enemy with wine diverted their thoughts from war to dancing. Bacchic orgies were employed in the system of warfare.' It is very interesting to note that the almost similar method was used by the party of Greeks who came to rescue Lady Charition. Wine was freely used and when the Indians started dancing the Greeks overpowered them. Even drums were used to encourage frenzied dance.

There are some striking similarities between the Indo-Greek farce and the play of Euripides named *Iphigenia in Tauris*. Both the plays have the setting of the courtyard of Moon Goddess. Heroines of both the plays are priestesses at the temples and both are rescued by their brothers to Greece in ships. However, the stories of both the plays develop on different lines. Of course, there can be no comparison between the literary merits of these plays.

Flute-Girls

Citing evidences historian Tarn says that according to Poseidonius some 'flute girls' were shipped by Eudorux for his attempted voyage to India at the end of second century B.C. The flute girls were popular entertainers and were at great demand at symposia-convivial meetings for drinking and intellectual conversations. Intellectuals used to enjoy their company in various ways in an atmosphere full of fun and frolic, dancing and music. Professional jesters were also there on invitation.

However some intellectuals seem to have detested their presence also. Hans Licht says: 'If serious men during the 'drinking round'

were accustomed to give themselves to serious conversation, they sent the flute-players home, as Eryximachus did in Plate (*Sympos.*, 176; *Protagoras*, 347), remarking that the flute-player might play something to herself, if she liked, or to the women in the room'; and Plato in *Protagoras* declaims more vigorously against it: 'Many are unable, owign to poverty of intellect, to converse with or amuse one another over their cups. Hence they raise the price of flute-girls, and hire for hard cash the foreign note of flutes and converse through their voice. But where honest gentlemen and educated tipplers come together we find among them no flute-girls, dancing-girls or harp-girls, but they are quite contented with each other's conversation, of which their own voices are the medium, without any farcical nonsense.' However, these adverse remarks indicate gay nature of the symposia in ancient Greece.

In the *Kamasutra* of Vatsyayana occurs description of *Goshthi* of intellectuals at which *Ganikas* adept in sixty-four arts including dancing, singing and playing on musical instruments were invited. Drinking wine was common at such meetings which were attended by jesters and fun-makers to delight the participants (*KS*, 1.4).

Hetaira can be called as Greek counterpart of Indian *Ganika.* Both are known for their physical charm and intellectual qualities. A flute-player by profession Lamia of Athens was one of the most famous hetairai of ancient Greece. Licht mentions fragments of many comedies with hetairai as heroines. This reminds us of famous *Ganika* Vasantasena who is known as a heroine of the plays by Bhasa and Shudraka. Many more examples can be cited. One act hilarious plays, known as *Bhana*, were written in India around *Ganikas.* One of these farces mentions *Yavani* Karpoorturishta, Greek singing-girl or flute-girl migrated or exported to India. Beautiful young boys used to serve wine at symposium of intellectuals in Greece. They were known as cupbearers. Xenophon admires graceful Persian cupbearer holding wine goblet with three fingers and serving the guests at symposium (*Cyrop.*, i, 3, 8). Karpoorturishta is also described as holding a wine cup with three fingers.

Cordax

Cordax or Kordax is a dance exhibitionist in character in which body is uncovered intentionally. Licht remarks: 'The satyrs in the satyric drama were in habit of dancing with grotesque movements and the defiant stripping off the cloths. Equally indecent, or rather erotic was the Cordax which consisted chiefly of reeling backwards and forwards, as though representing drunkenness; and to this was added a series of grotesque and unseemly movements that ostentatiously and prominently exhibited the movements of the body, and apparently intentional denudation . . .' It seems that the dance used to be included in Greek comedies, for, Aristophanes in his play *The Clouds* makes his chorus say:

> My Comedy's a modest girl: she doesn't play the fool
> By bringing on a great thick floppy red-tipped leather tool
> To give the kids a laugh, or making fun of men who're bald;
> Requests to dance a cordax simply leave the lass appalled.

Kalidasa in his play *Malavikagnimitram* resorts to charming exhibitionism by making Malavika dance in near nude condition (Vigatanepathya) so that delightful movements of her body could be watched by the dance experts. Bharata is against nudity on the stage.

Glossary

Abhinaya	Acting, dramatic gestures. Bharata uses the term in a wider sense and also includes in it scenic representation, make-up, recitation of dramatic text and depiction of various psychological states.
Acharya	Teacher.
Ajivaka	An ancient heretic cult of wandering mendicants. Mankhali Goshal, a contemporary of Buddha, is considered to be its founder and chief apostle.
Angahara	Major dance movement composed of smaller units known as *Karanas.* The combined movement of hands and feet striking a particular dance posture is called *Karana.* They are very well sculpted on Chidambaram and many other south Indian temples. According to *Natyashastra* there are 32 *Angaharas* and 108 *Karanas.*
Apsara	Heavenly nymph, celestial dancing girl. Apsaras are water deities who can change their form at will. Beautiful *Apsara* sculptures adorn the temples all over India. According to the *Natyashastra,* Brahma created *Apsaras* to participate in dramatic performances.

Arthopakshepakas — Five kinds of interludes or link-scenes. They are *Vishkambhaka*, *Chulika*, *Praveshaka*, *Ankavatara* and *Ankamukha*. The story link is maintained with the help of these five supporting scenes in which usually minor characters appear. They more or less fulfil the function of the Chorus in Greek theatre.

Bhikku — Bhikshu, religious mendicant, Buddhist monk.

Bhuta — Ghost.

Bodhisatva — One who is destined to achieve enlightenment, just about to become a Buddha.

Daitya — Demons.

Danava — Genii.

Devadasi — A girl dedicated to a temple for serving the deities. She used to sing, dance and participate in dramatic performances to please the gods. One of the earliest mentions of a *Devadasi*, Sutanuka by name, is found in the Jogimara cave inscription of third century B.C. Temple prostitution in various forms was practised in ancient world. In 464 B.C. Xenophon of Corinth dedicated hundred girls to the temple of Aphrodite as he won victories in Olympian games. The temple girls in Greece used to sing, dance before the deities and also participate in various rituals.

Gandharva — Celestial musicians and singers. Consorts of *Apsaras*. They play on the Veena and are expert in various modes of singing.

Ganika — Accomplished courtesan adept in the sixty-four arts. *Ganikas* were invited to participate in

dramatic production. The *Kamasutra* says that the prostitute who learns the sixty-four arts is called *Ganika* and she is respected by the people. Ancient Buddhist literature mentions the name of Ganika Ambapali of Vaishali who became the follower of Buddha. Ganika Vasantasena is the heroine of Bhasa's play *Charudattam* and Shudraka's play *Mricchakatika*.

Gatha — Song.

Giri Maha — Festive worship of a hill deity. In the *Bhagavat Purana* there is a story of Krishna and the cowherd community worshipping mount Govardhana.

Granthika — Rhapsodist, narrator.

Guhyakas — Attendants of Kubera, the Lord of Riches. They secretly guard his treasures which includes the precious metals and stones hidden inside the earth.

Indra — One of the important Vedic deities. Lord of heaven. In the Vedas we find many hymns written in his praise. He rides an elephant named Airavat and the thunderbolt is his weapon. He is fond of the juice of the Soma plant, music and dancing. *Apsaras* dance at his court with the musical orchestra of the *Gandharvas* in attendance. He himself is described as a *Nrutu*—dancer. According to the *Natyashastra* it is in the festival held in honour of Indra's flagstaff that the art of drama originated.

Indrani — Wife of Indra, also known as Shachi.

Kala — The arts, sixty-four in number. The list of arts given in the *Kamasutra* includes many applied as well as fine arts. Some of the arts mentioned therein are as follows:

	Singing, dancing, playing on musical instruments, painting, flower arrangement, make-up and costume designing, scenic representation, making mechanised puppets, knowledge of poetics, book reading, enactment of dramatic episodes, knowledge of dialects of different regions, art of changing and disguising the appearance of persons, carpentry, architecture, water sports, magic etc.
Kathak	Narrator, story teller. Reciter of a story with acting.
Lokapalas	Guardian deities of the eight quarters. They are Kubera (North), Soma or Ishana (North-East), Indra (East), Agni (South-East), Yama (South), Surya (South-West), Varuna (West), Marut (North-West).
Madana	God of love. Also known as Kama. Festivals full of dance, music and theatrical performances were held in honour of him and his wife Rati. A beautiful Kama-Rati sculpture is stationed at the entrance of the Channakeshaveshvara temple at Halebid in Karnataka.
Mahotsava	A big festival, grand festivity.
Malav	Person belonging to the Malava region of Central India.
Mara	Satan, deity of evil forces. He tried first to frighten Buddha by creating hurdles in his penance, then his lovely daughters tried in vain to seduce Buddha by dancing and singing before him and exhibiting their feminine charms. Many Buddhist monuments depict this episode.
Mekhala	Girdle.
Mithuna	A couple comprising a male and a female. In

Indian art it is considered an auspicious symbol. Hence such couples, many a time in erotic postures, are painted on walls. Many temples are adorned with *Mithuna* sculptures. They betray the influence of the ancient fertility cult and its later manifestations.

Mudra — Symbolic hand gesture used in rituals and dance. According to some scholars *Nritya Mudras* were evolved from ritualistic hand gestures.

Nadi Maha — Festival held in the honour of the river deities. Even today rivers are worshipped with great reverence in India. Every evening thousands of lamps are offered to the river Ganga at Hardwar. Anthropomorphic representations of Ganga and Yamuna are found all over India. Usually Ganga is found standing on a crocodile and Yamuna on a tortoise. There are other rivers too that are equally venerated.

Naga Maha — Festival held in the honour of the serpent deity. Serpent worship in India is at least as ancient as the Indus Valley Civilization. The sculptures of *Nagas* in their natural or anthropomorphic form are found in abundance. According to Indian mythology the earth rests on the hood of the serpent Vasuki. Balarama, the elder brother of Krishna, is considered as an incarnation of the serpent deity. He was immensely fond of music, dancing, water sports and wine. It is obvious that these things must have been offered by the devotees to the *Naga* deity to appease him. Every year *Naga Panchami* is still celebrated in India in honour of the deity.

Nataraja — Shiva as a cosmic dancer, supreme dancer, primeval actor. He is the presiding deity of the forceful '*Tandava*' style of dance while his con-

sort Parvati is the presiding deity of the graceful and delicate '*Lasya*' style of dance. A majority of Sanskrit playwrights started their plays with *Nandi* verse dedicated to Nataraja Shiva. Through his dance the universe is created and ultimately destroyed. He is a symbol of theatrical arts.

Nirritti — Earth Goddess.

Pani — A trading community of *Asuras*. In the Vedas they are described as a miserly lot, earning a large amount of money in the form of interest on the loans extended by them to the people. They stole the cows of Indra, hence Sarama, the guardian bitch of the herd, went to them asking them to return the cows. By their clever talk the Panis tried to win over Sarama to their side but failed.

Parakiya — Wife of another person, one belonging to someone else.

Pashupat — An ancient cult worshipping Shiva as Pashupati. The ascetics belonging to this cult live and behave like animals—Pashu. Free from social conventions and norms they wander around at will. Dancing and singing form part of their ritualistic worship. Lakulisha (first century A.D.), their chief apostle, is considered an incarnation of Shiva. Many Shiva temples in Orissa, including the famous Vetala temple at Bhuvaneshvar, are adorned with the sculptural representation of Lakulisha along with the figures of alluring dancing girls.

Pishach — A kind of evil spirit.

Pratishirsha — Mask.

Preksha — A play, dramatic performance.

Pururavas	A Vedic king, son of Ila. The Apsara Urvashi married and later deserted him. According to the *Shatapatha Brahmana* he performed certain rituals and became a *Gandharva* and re-united with Urvashi in heaven. According to the *Puranas* he was a founder of the famous Moon dynasty (*Soma Vansha*).
Rasa	Basic aesthetic sentiments portrayed in art and literature. They are eight according to Bharata – Erotic (*Sringara*), Comic (*Hasya*), Pathetic (*Karuna*), Furious (*Raudra*), Heroic (*Veera*), Terrible (*Bhayanaka*), Odious (*Bhibhatsa*) and Wondrous (*Adbhuta*).
Ritwik	Priests who offer prayer at a *Yajna* ceremony.
Rudra	Rudra is the terrible aspect of Shiva with immense destructive power which is manifested through the fury of nature.
Rupaka	The drama. Dramatists have enumerated ten major and eighteen minor forms of drama. The minor forms are known as *Uparupakas.*
Saman	Also Samaja, Samajja. Used in literature to denote festive gathering, dramatic performance, fair, place of entertainment, theatre, pavilion erected to watch games, etc. The institution of *Saman* as a festival with dramatic entertainment is at least as old as the Vedas.
Shakta	Worshipper of Shakti, a cosmic female principal. The Shakti cult has its origin in the ancient cult of the mother goddess. Shiva is her consort. She is divine energy, source of creation, '*Maya*' or '*Prakriti*', and is worshipped by her devotees with esoteric tantric rituals.

Shisnadeva	Phallic deity mentioned in the *Rig Veda* and *Nirukta*.
Snatak	Religious student just graduated.
Soma	A plant or its intoxicating juice. Soma was the most favourite drink of Vedic deities, particularly Indra.
Sreshthi	Distinguished man, head or president of merchant guild.
Stree	Woman.
Sutra	Aphoristic rules.
Tantra	A cult based on mysterious Yogic rituals. In the *Vamachari* tantric cults, music, dancing, drinking wine and sexual intercourse are parts of ritualistic worship. According to some scholars the symbolic gesture language developed by the tantric priests was later adopted by the dramatists. Brahmanical, Jain and Buddhist religions have their own tantric sub-sects and presiding deities. However Shiva and Shakti are the source of many Tantra sects.
Triratna	The three gems—Buddha, the law (*Dhamma*) and the monkish brotherhood (*Sangha*). They are together represented by a trident-like symbol.
Urvashi	A beautiful *Apsara* who lived with king Pururavas for some time. Her condition was that she should never see Pururavas in the nude. On one occasion she saw the king without any clothes on, so she deserted him. Some scholars contend that this is a symbolic story of Usha, the deity of early morning and the Sun. According to one account she once acted in a play directed by Bharata in the

court of Indra and by mistake uttered the name of Pururavas and hence Bharata punished her with the curse of leaving heaven and residing on earth.

Upamantrin — Jester companion of the king in the Vedic Age.

Vanika — Merchant.

Vaitalika — Bard who sings in praise of a king.

Vighnavinayakas — Causers of obstacles. Menacing attendants of Ganesh, son of Shiva who is also known as Vinayaka. Six in number, their names are Mita, Samita, Shal, Kusmad and Rajaputra.

Vita — Parasite, companion of a king, voluptuary. The *Kamasutra* defines *Vita* as a person skilled in various arts (*Gunavan*), enjoying prestige in the circles of citizens (and also among prostitutes) and living on their charity by acting as their middleman. He is witty and knows how to please people by his interesting talk.

Vrishakapi — Ape-man, the pet monkey of Indra. Some consider him a symbol of the rising sun in the Arctic region, and some as a phallic demon.

Yajna Vata — Place of fire sacrifice.

Yaksha — All powerful deities of vegetation and fertility endowed with many magical powers. Even the Rig Veda respects them and gives them the epithet '*Brahman*'. These handsome deities and their beautiful consorts, *Yakshis*, are fond of theatrical entertainments and wine. Kubera is their king. They also appear as the guardian deities of Buddhist monuments which are replete with their sculptural representations. In the later folk tales

we find *Yakshis* appearing before caravans of merchants in alluring forms and taking them to secluded place in the jungle. After amusing them with dance and song they used to devour them in the night. The heroine of Kalidasa's beautiful poem *Meghadutam* is a *Yakshi* of infinite charm. Festivals full of dancing, singing and music were arranged at their shrines.

Yama — The first ancestor and god of death. Son of Vivasvat and Sharanyu and twin brother of Yami. He is a giver of law and punishes those who break them by infernal punishments. Yami, his sister, passionately loved him and desired physical union. In later mythology Yami is described as river Yamuna also. There are many tribal myths of brothers and sisters copulating for procreation and continuity of the human race.

Yantra — Machine, mechanical contrivance.

Yavana — In general Greeks and Greco-Romans. The word is derived from the Persian term *Yauna*, persons coming from Ionia. The word is first mentioned in *Astadhyayi* of Panini. He also speaks about the Greek script, *Yavanalipyam.* The inscriptions of Ashoka mention the Greek kings on the border of his empire as *Yavanas.* In Buddhist literature they are referred to as *Yona* also.

Yogini — Attendant deities of Shiva and Kali, tantric deities closely connected with the cult of the mother goddess. They are worshipped with mysterious rites which include animal and sometimes human sacrifices, dancing, singing and drinking wine. They are generally considered to be sixty-four in number. Some of the famous *Yogini* temples in India are located at Bhedaghat and

Khajuraho in Madhya Pradesh and at Hirapur and Ranipur-Jharial in Orissa. In the centre of circular shrines of Yoginis in Orissa stand icons of Shiva. Some of the lovely Yoginis at Hirapur shrine are sculpted in dancing poses.

Yoni Tirtha — A holy place or shrine where the female procreative organ is worshipped. Kamakhya in Assam is one of the famous *Yoni tirthas* in India. Yet another such shrine is located near Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh.

Yupa — Sacrificial post to which animals to be sacrificed are tied.

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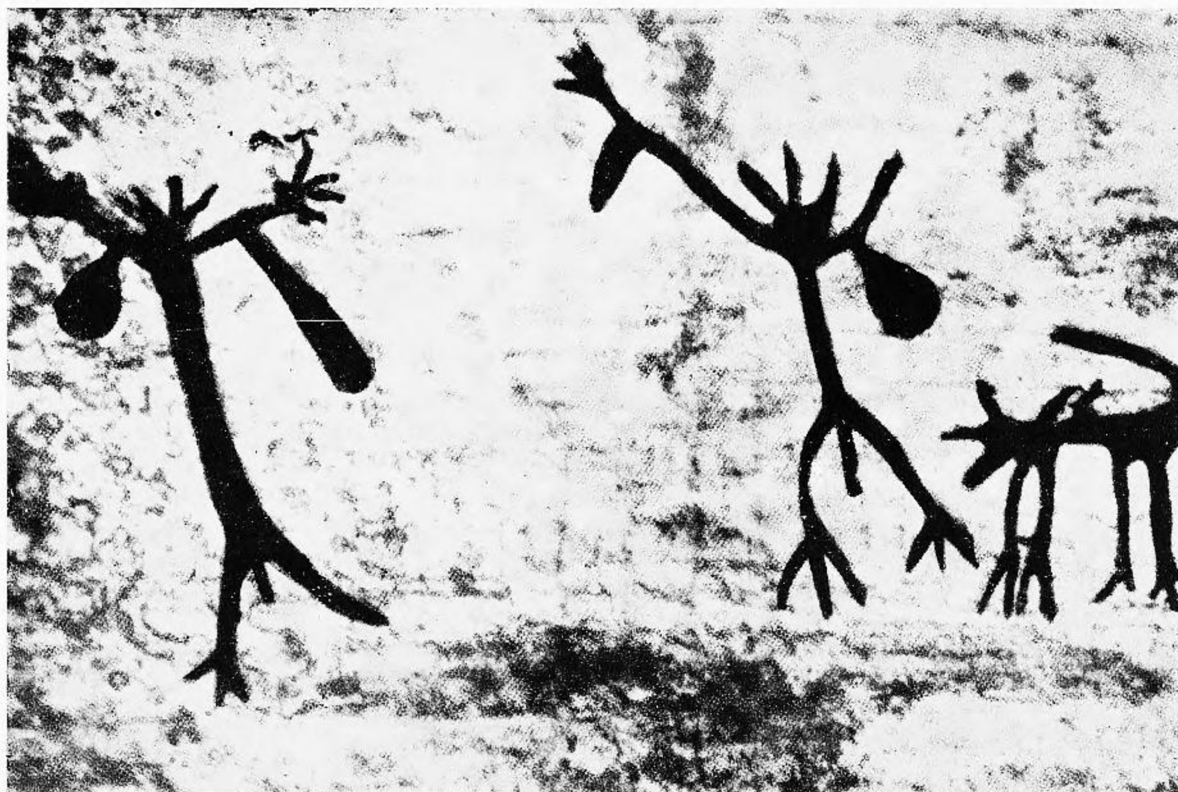
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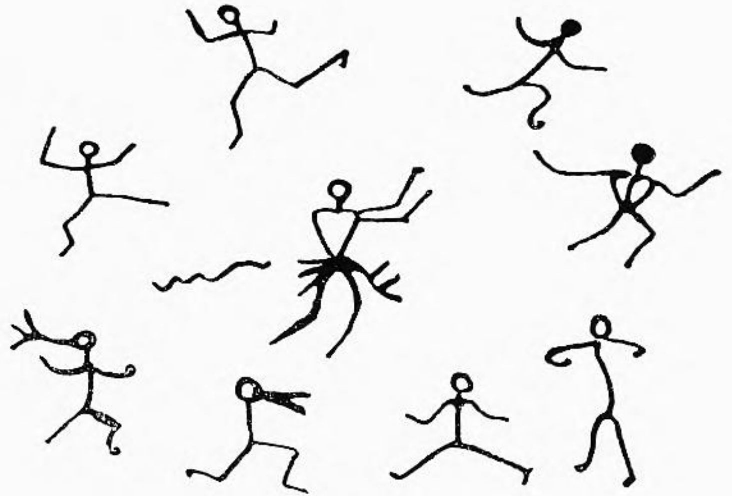


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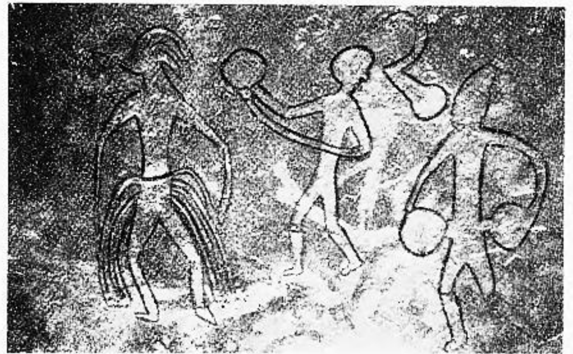
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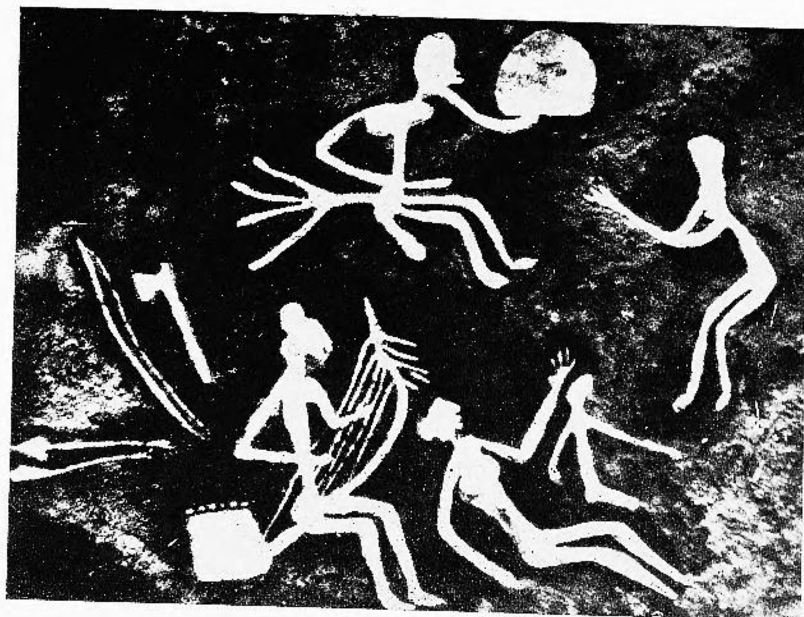
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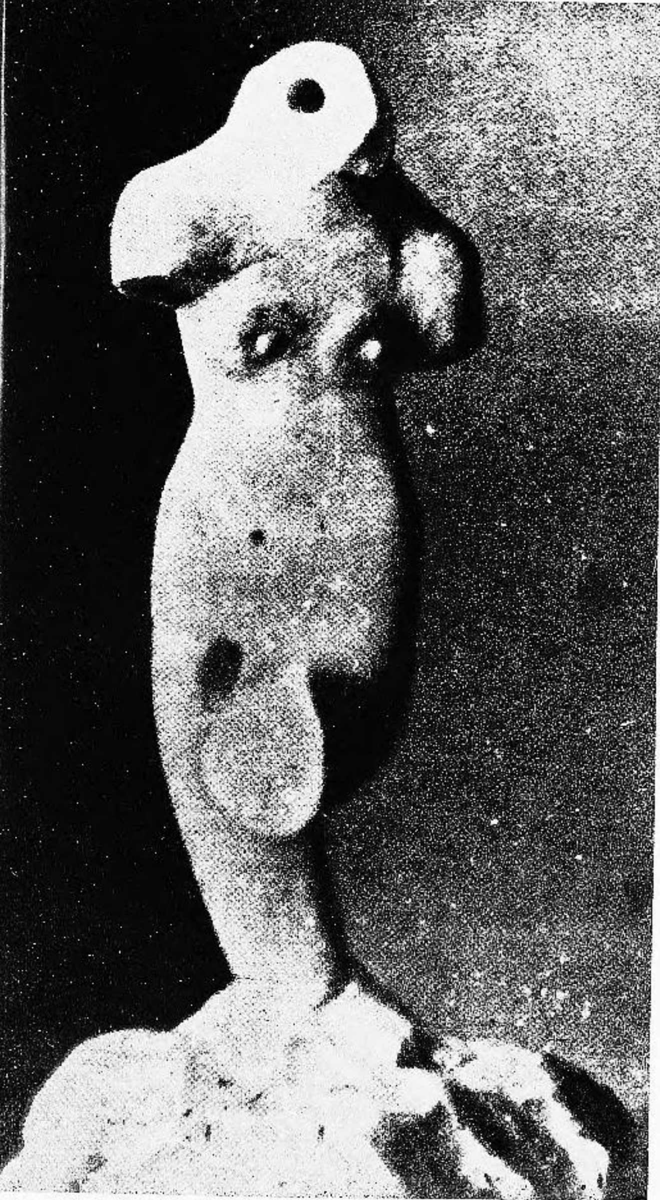


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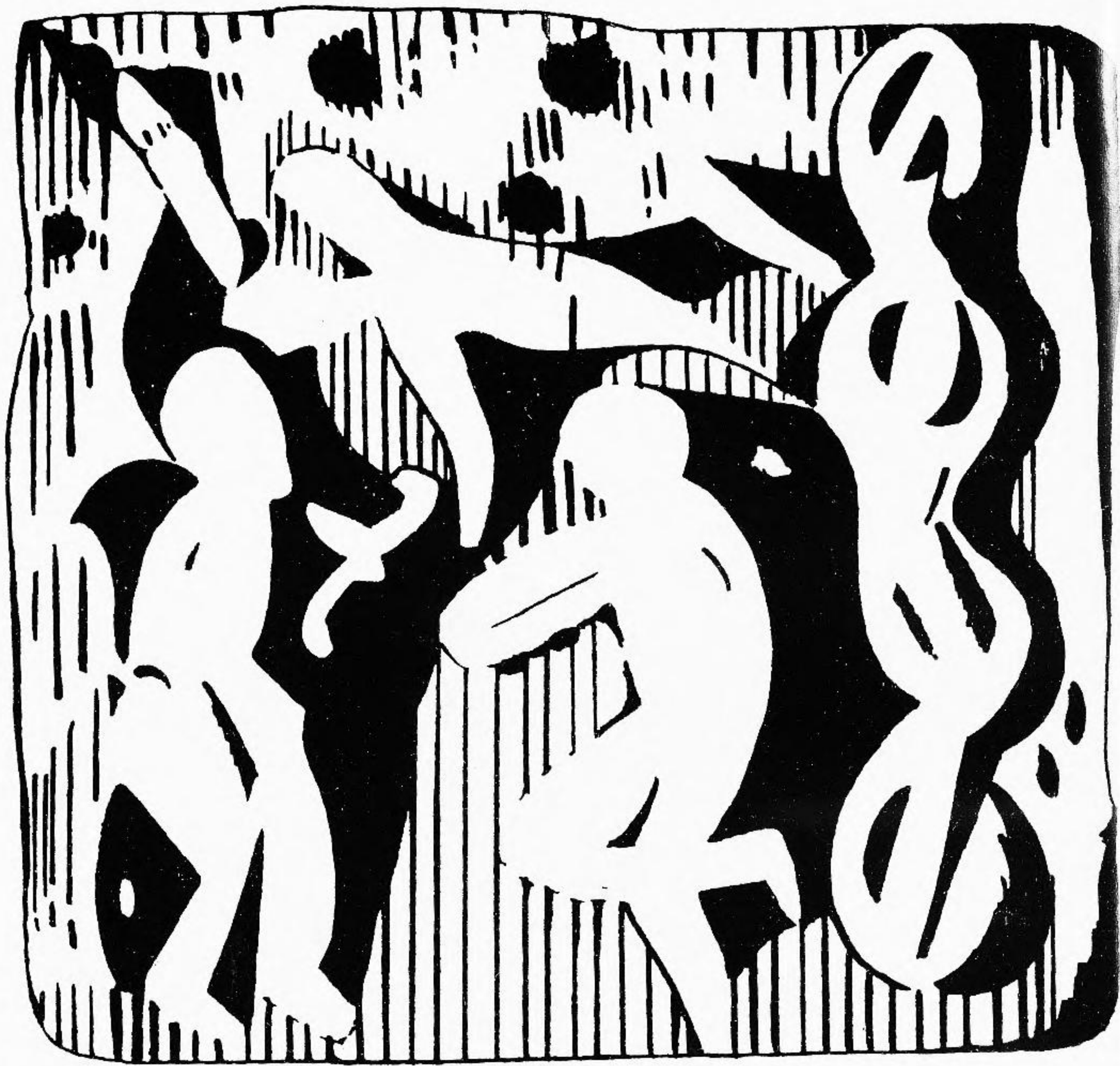
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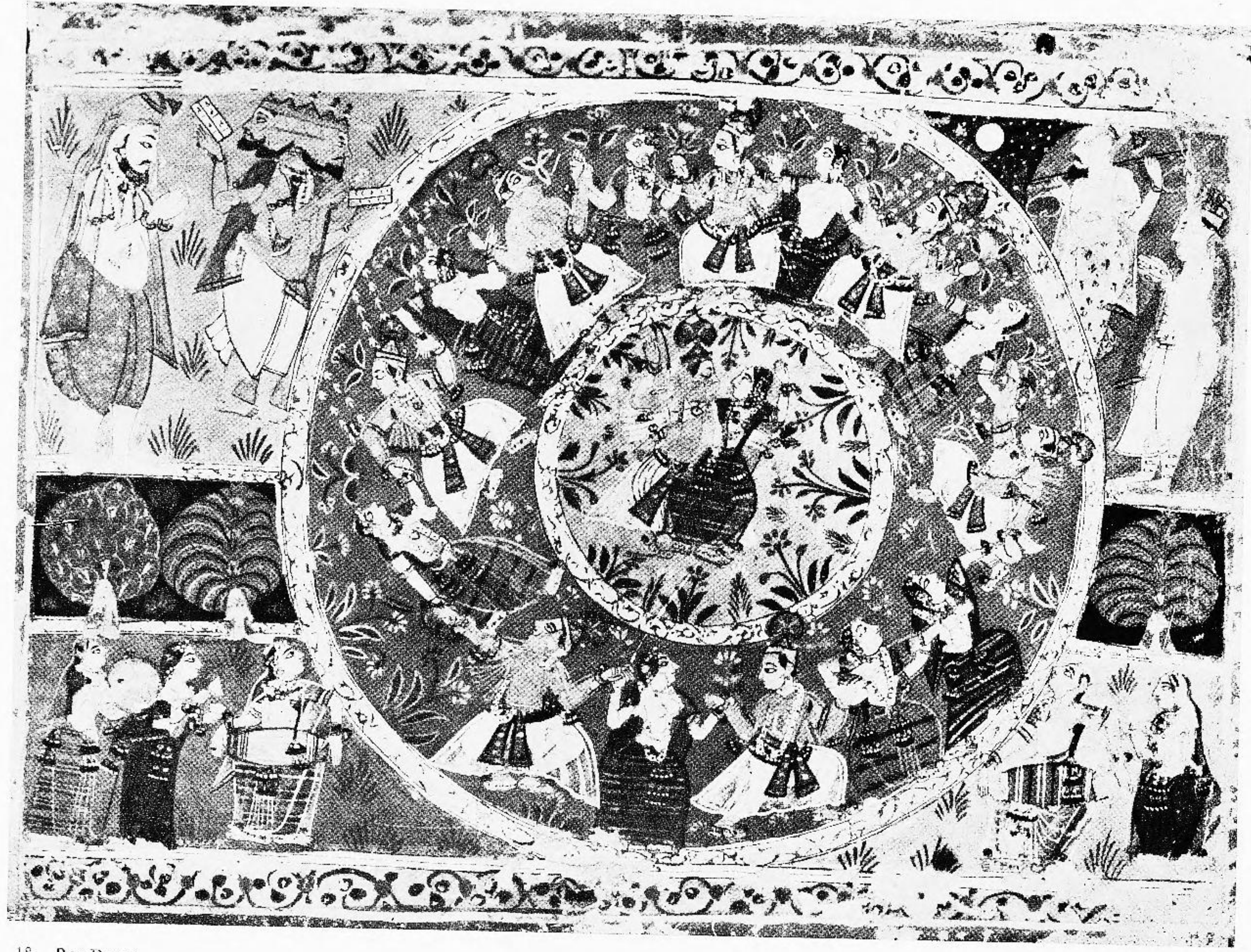
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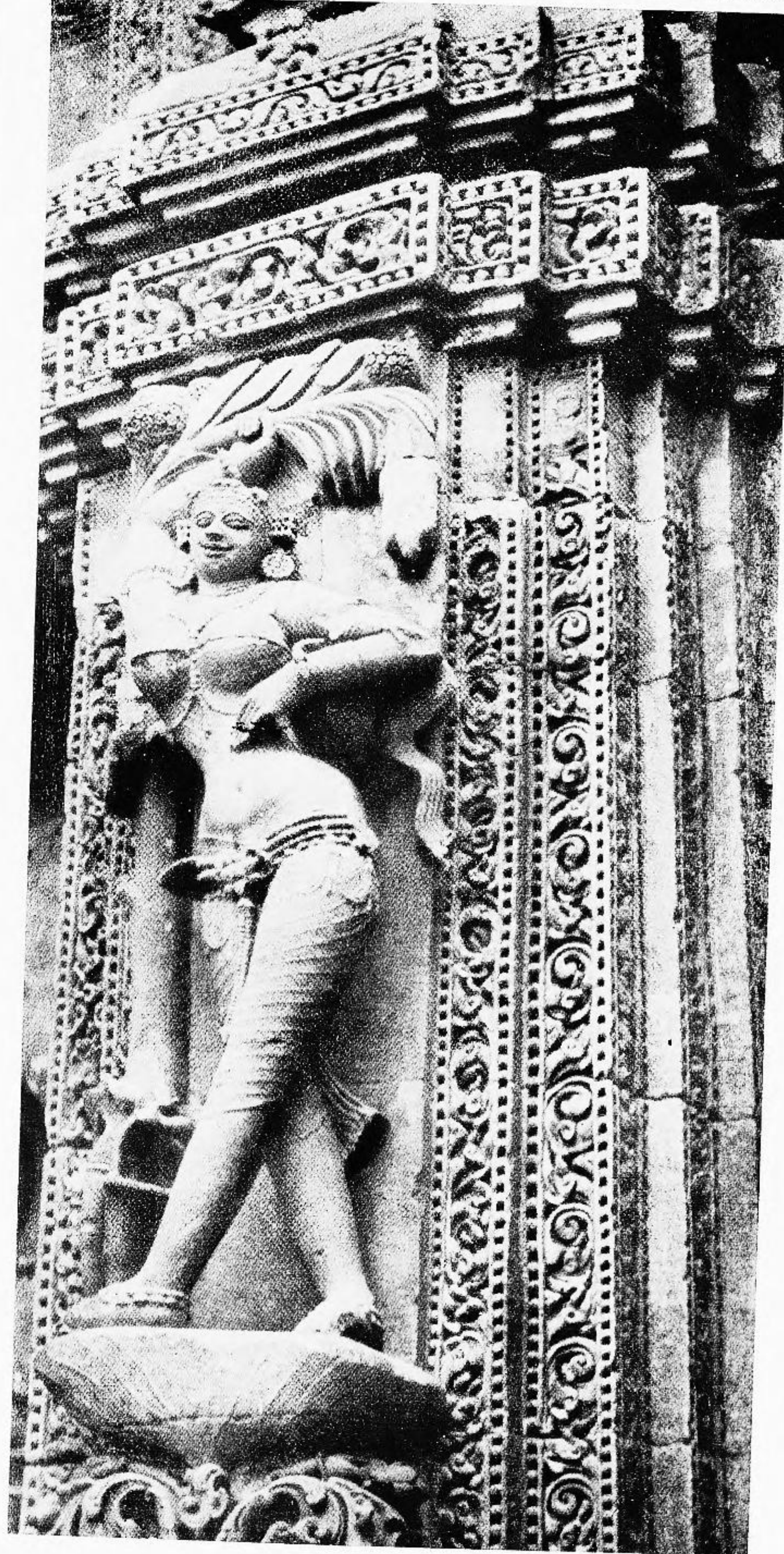
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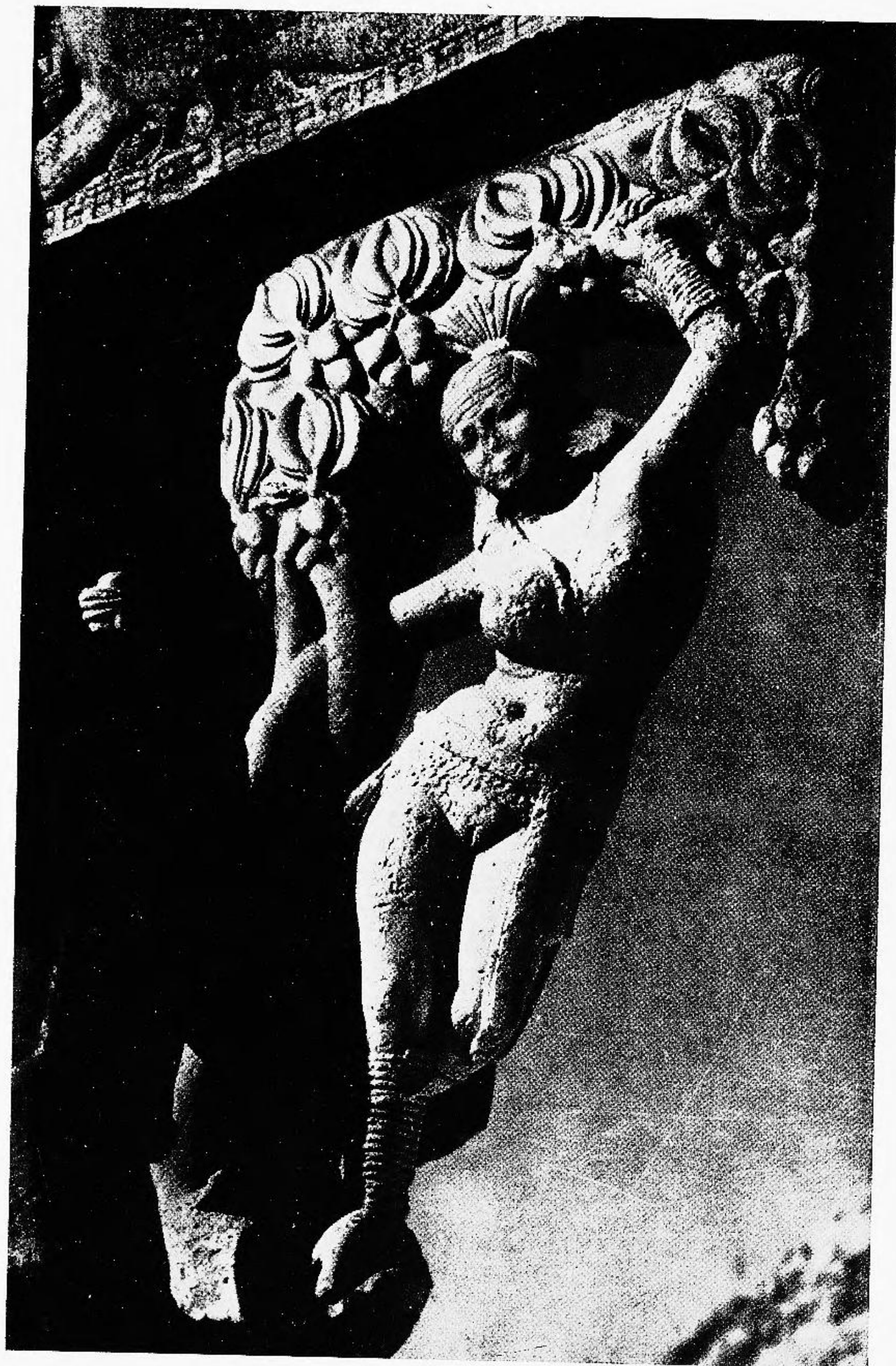
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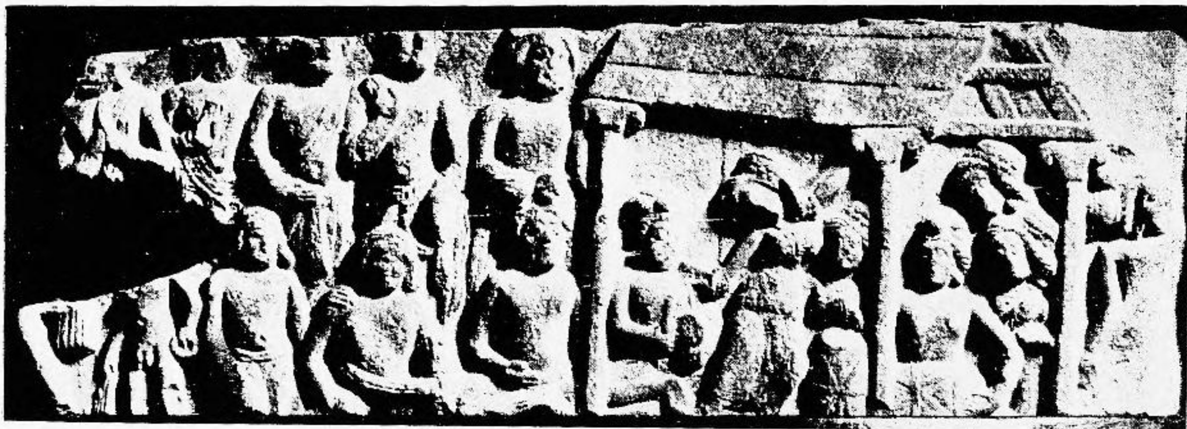




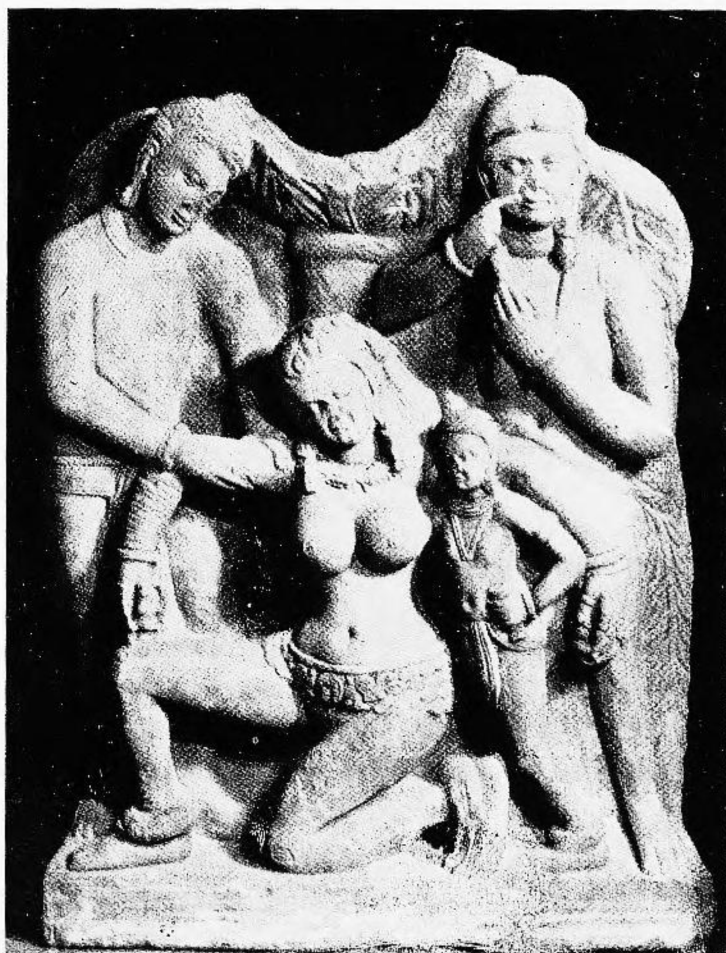
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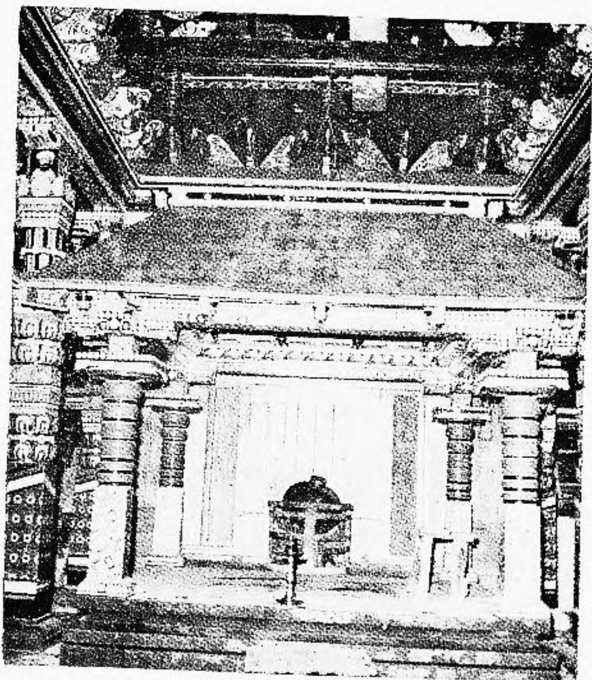


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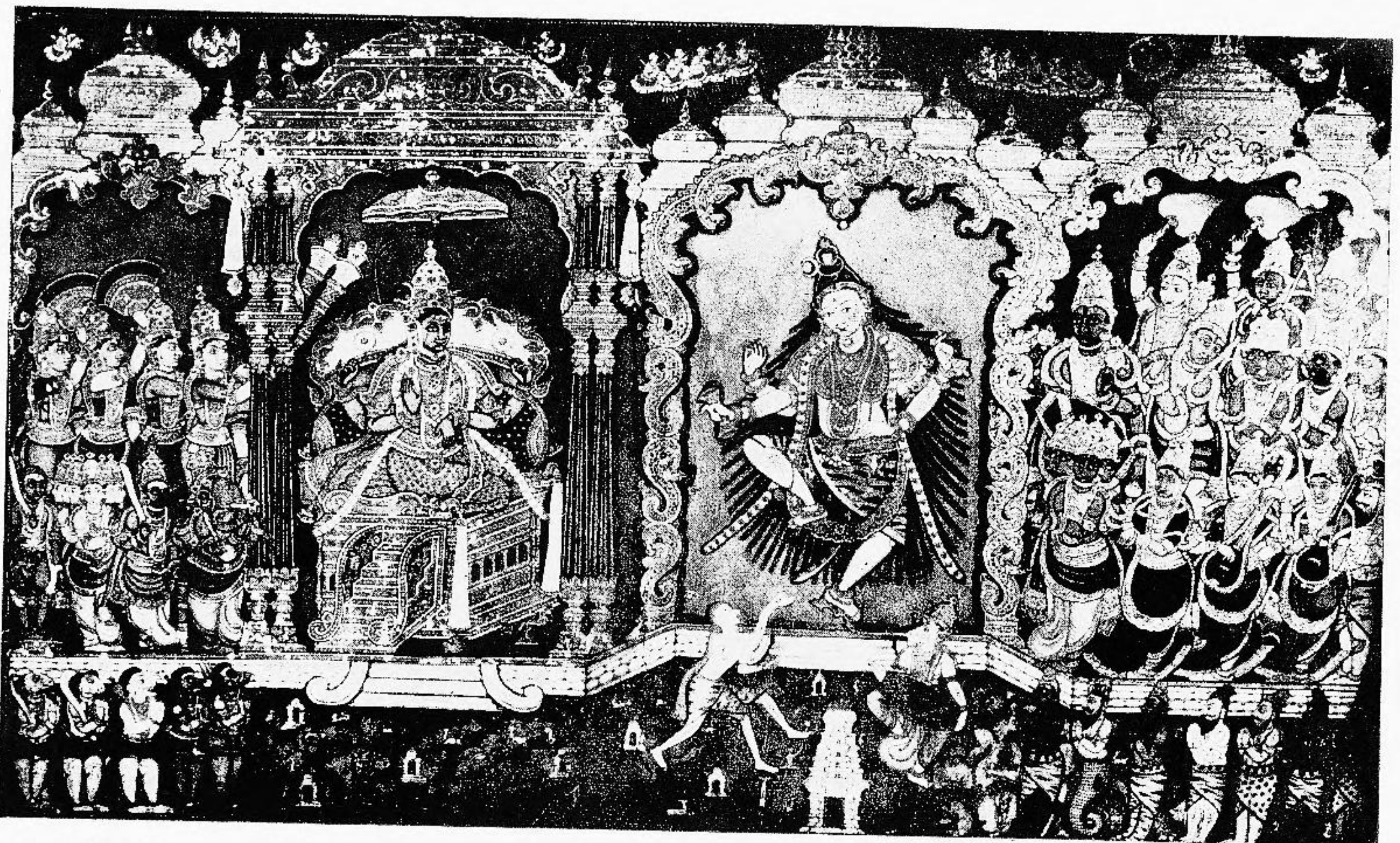
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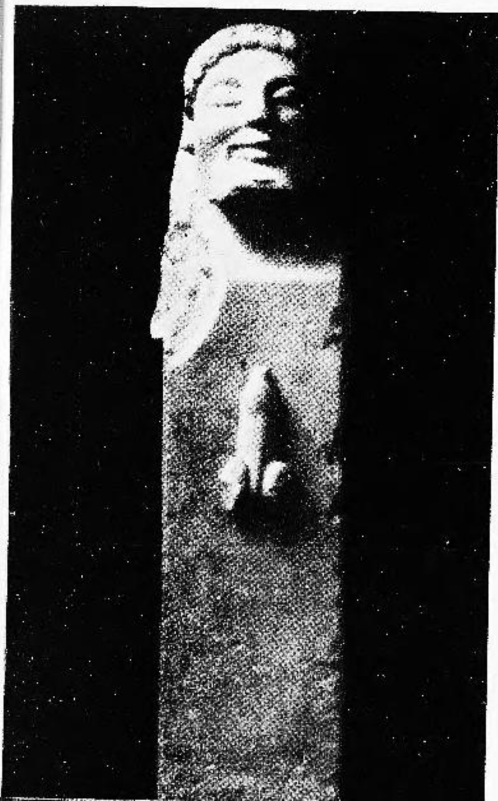


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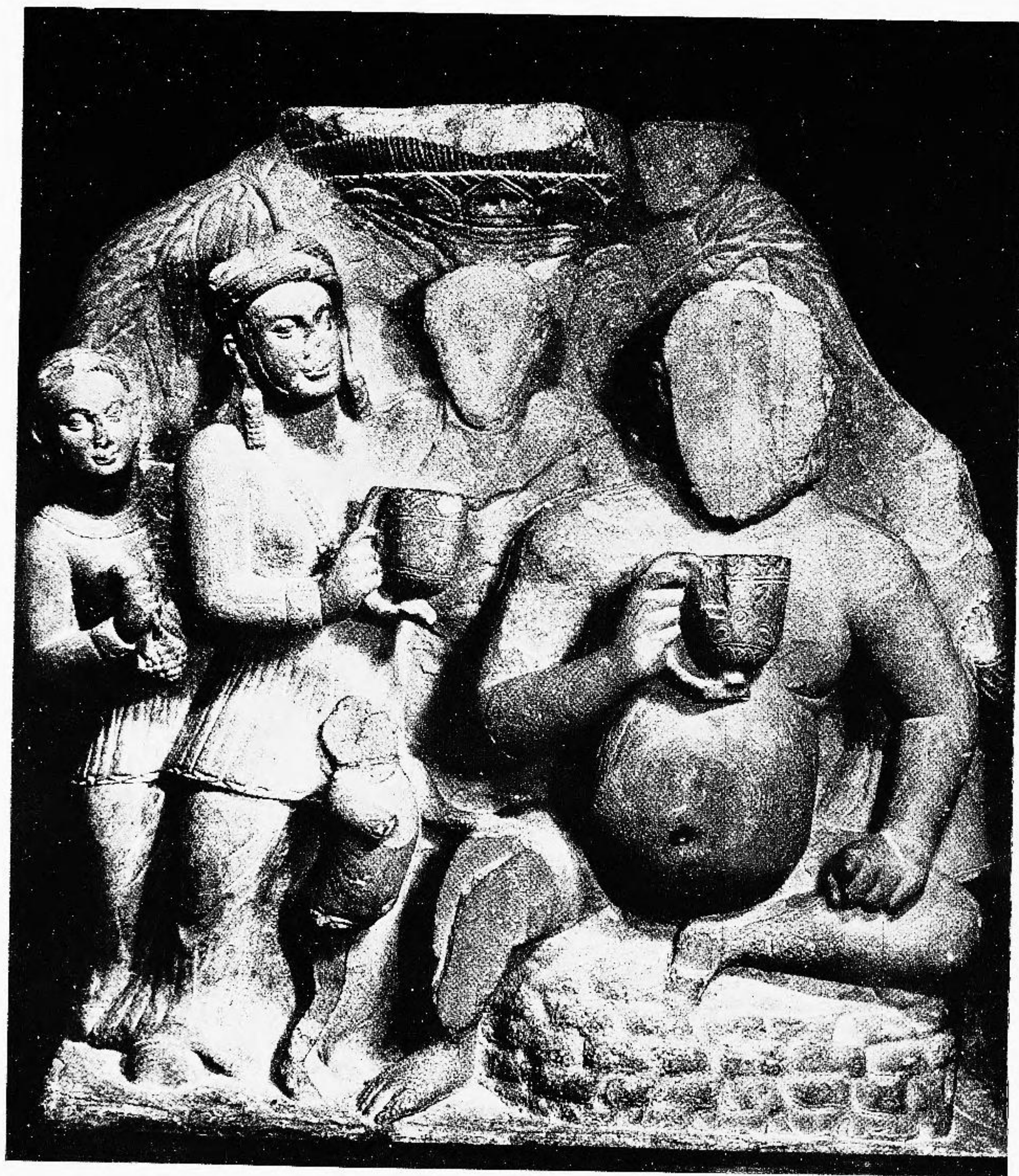
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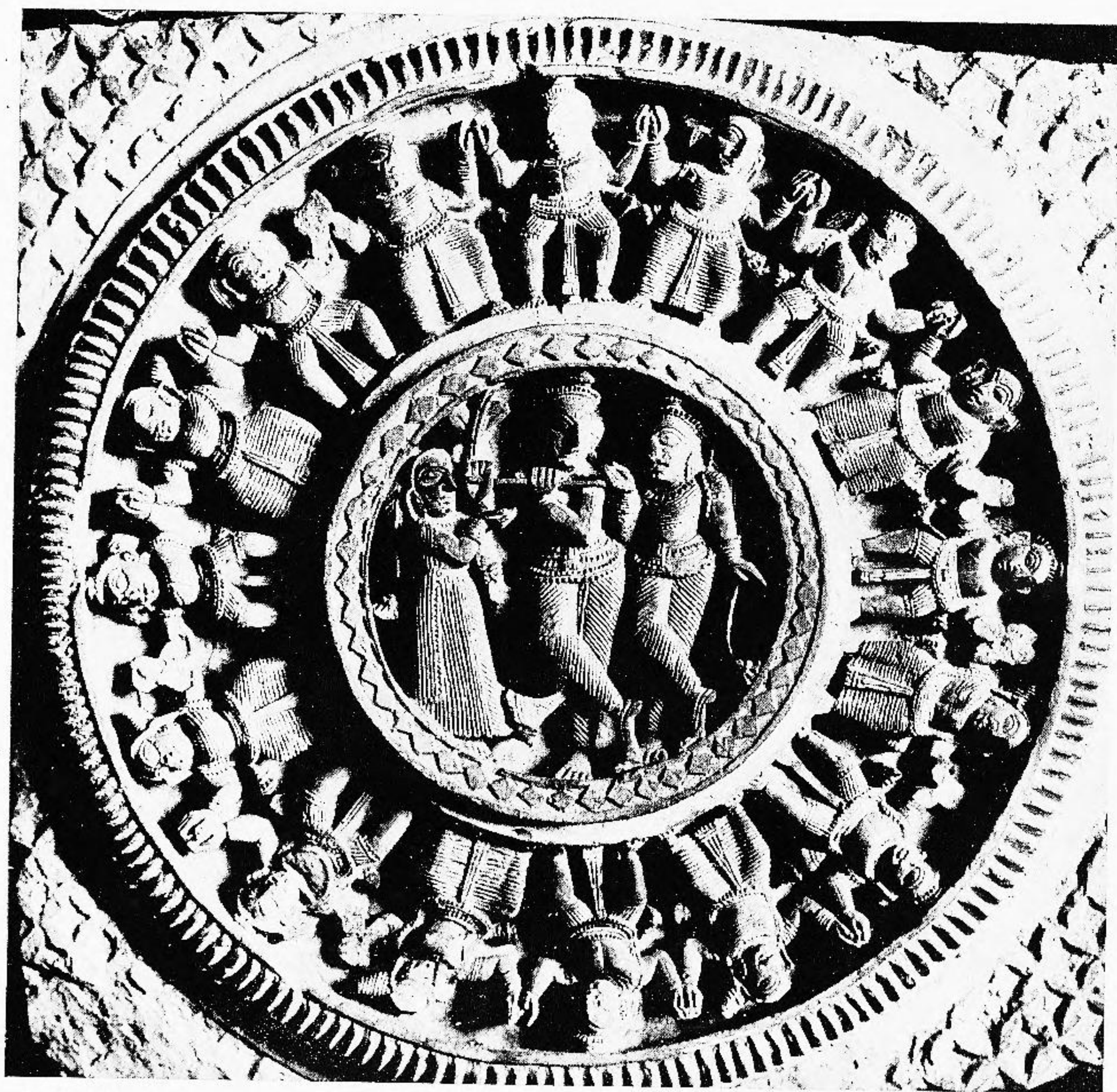




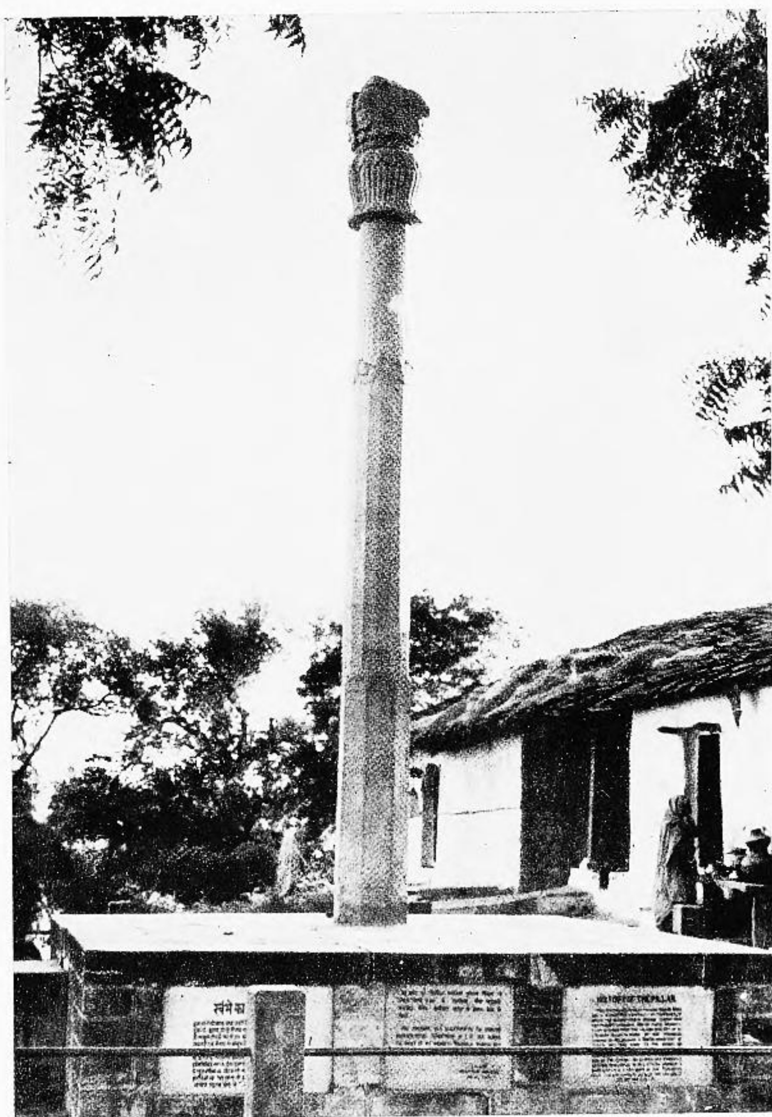
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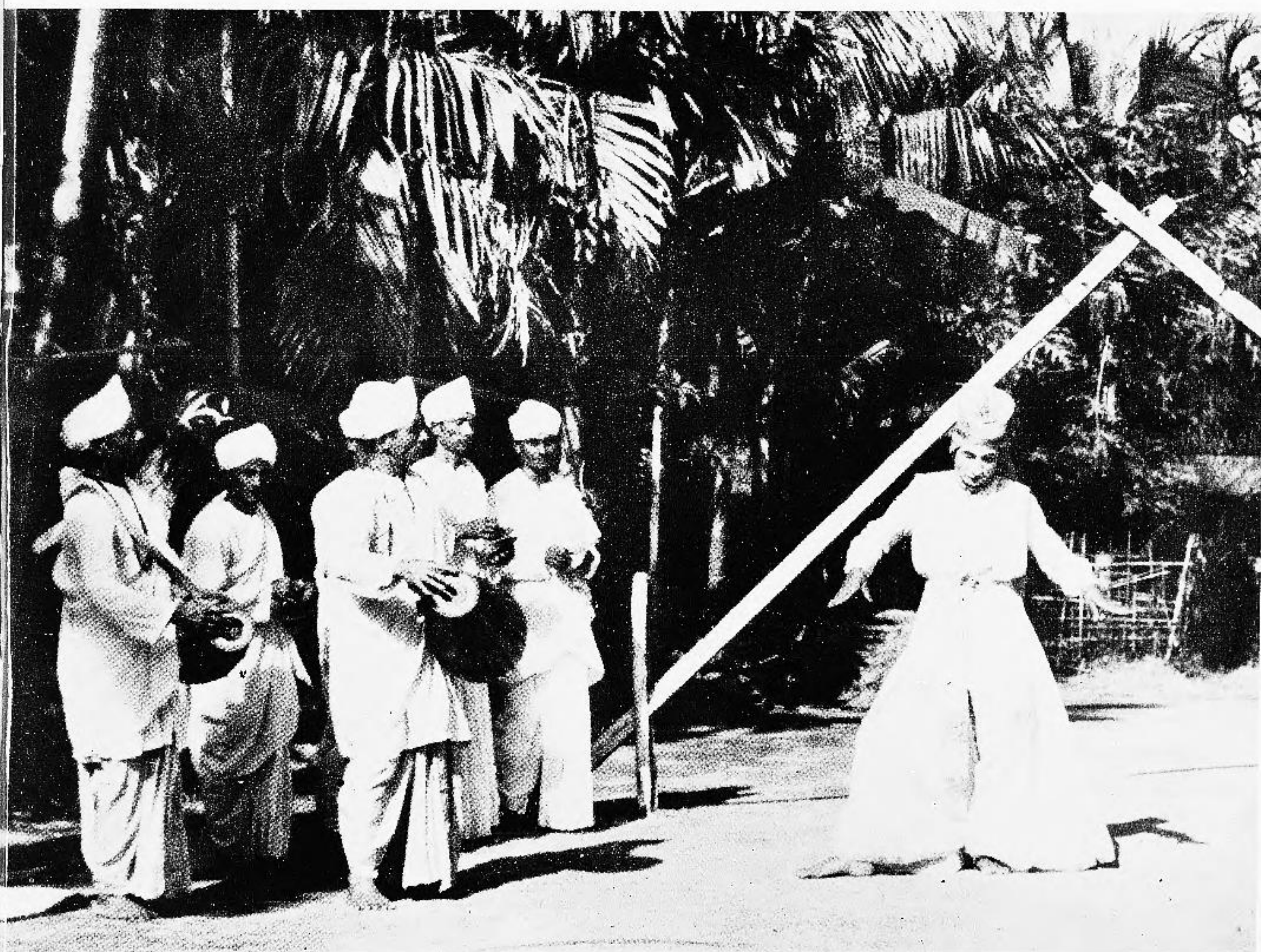
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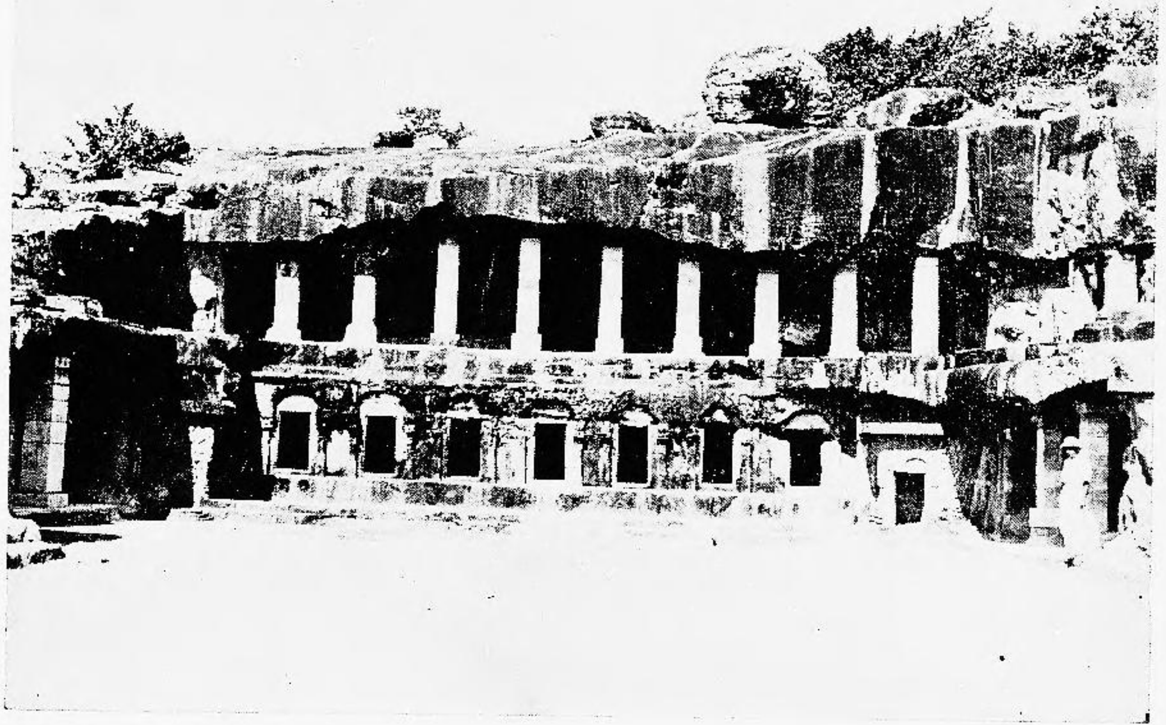




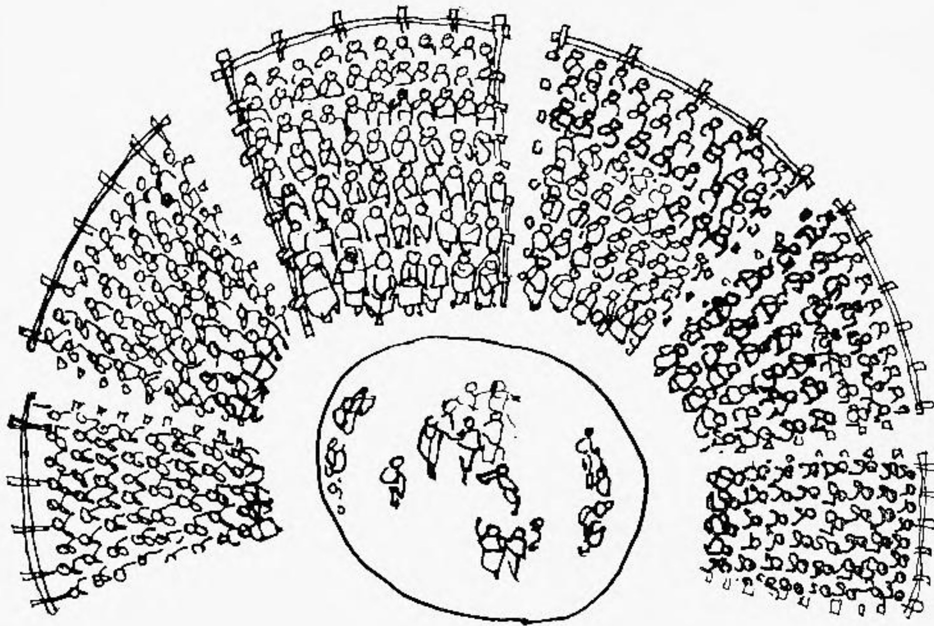
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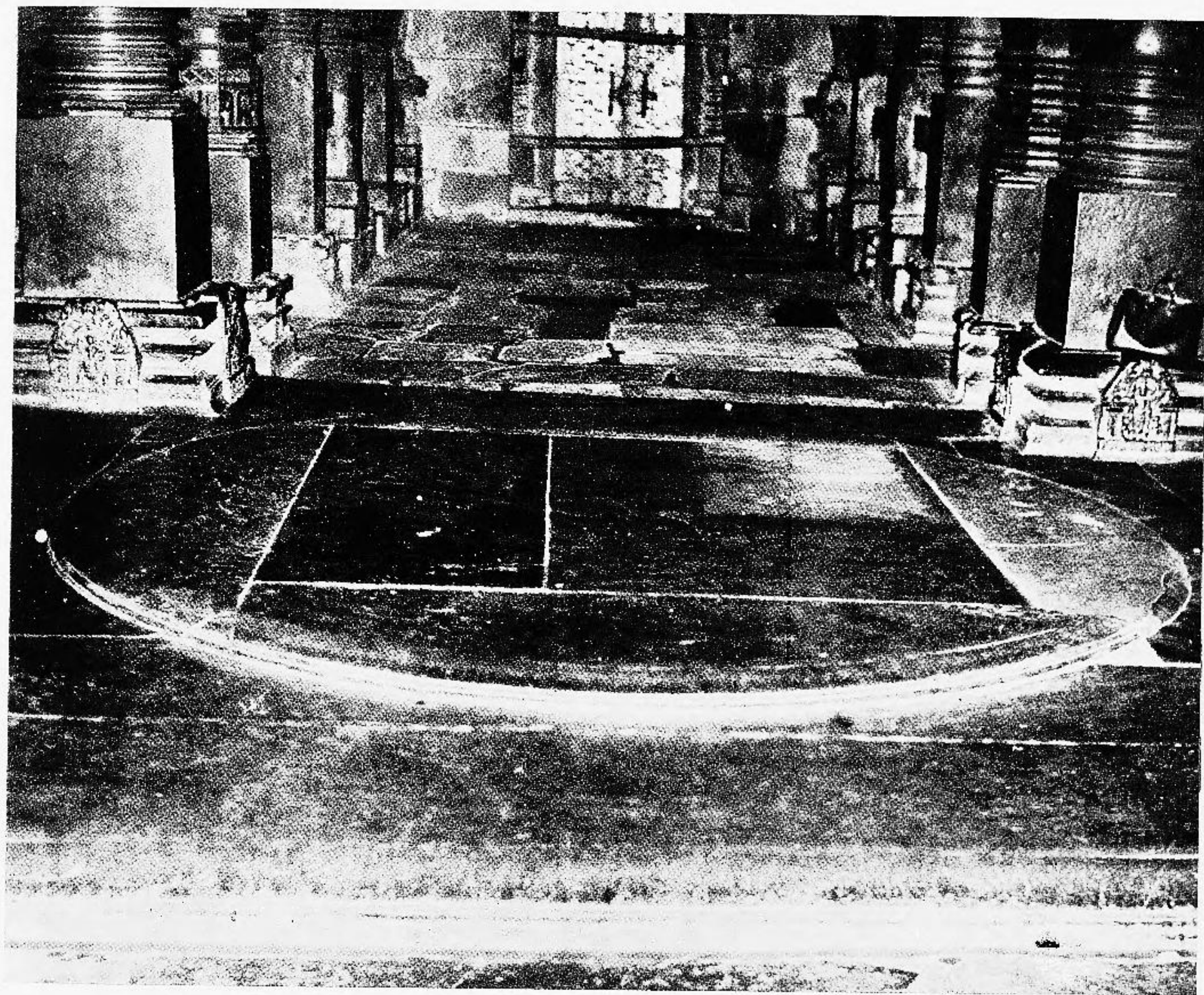
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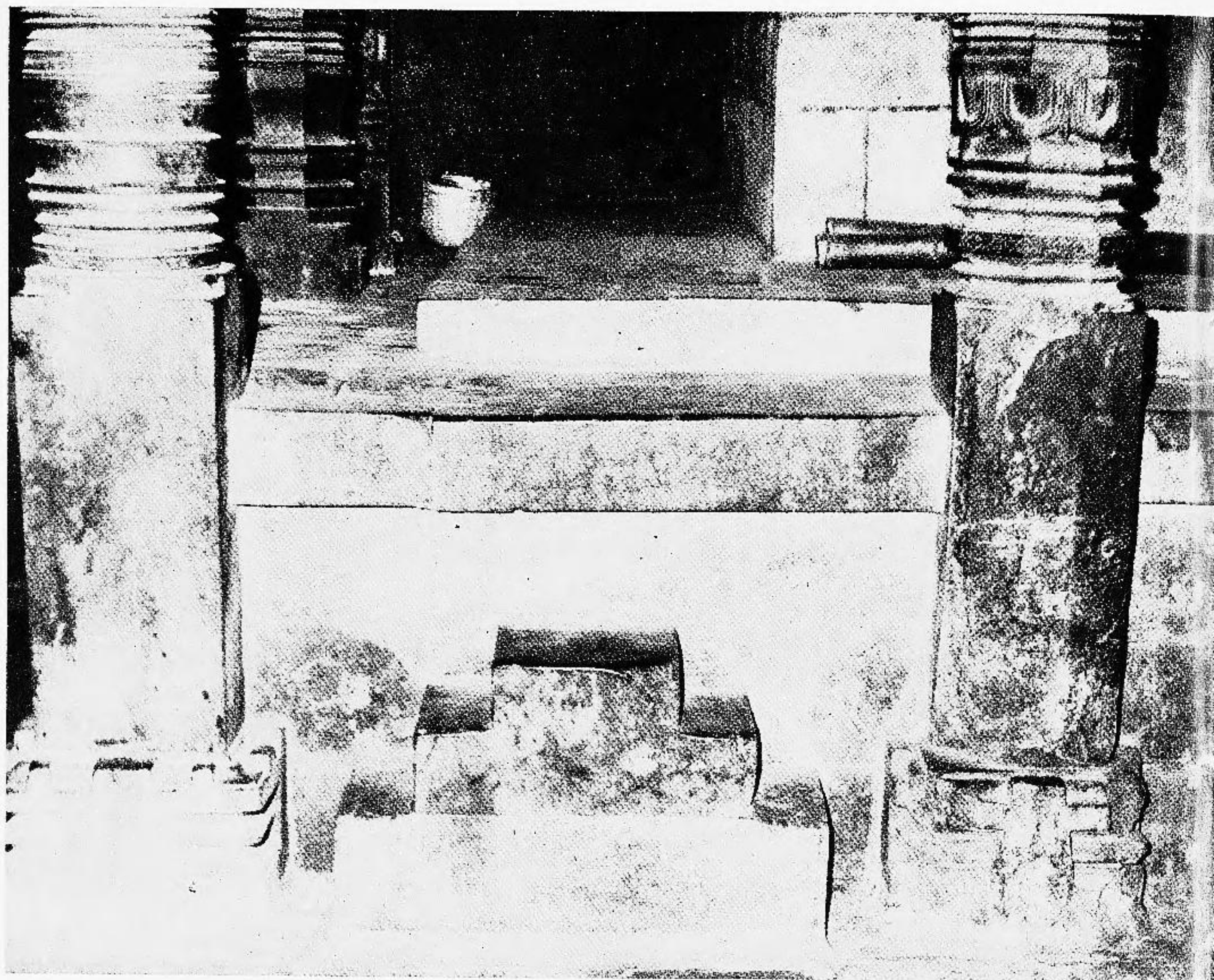
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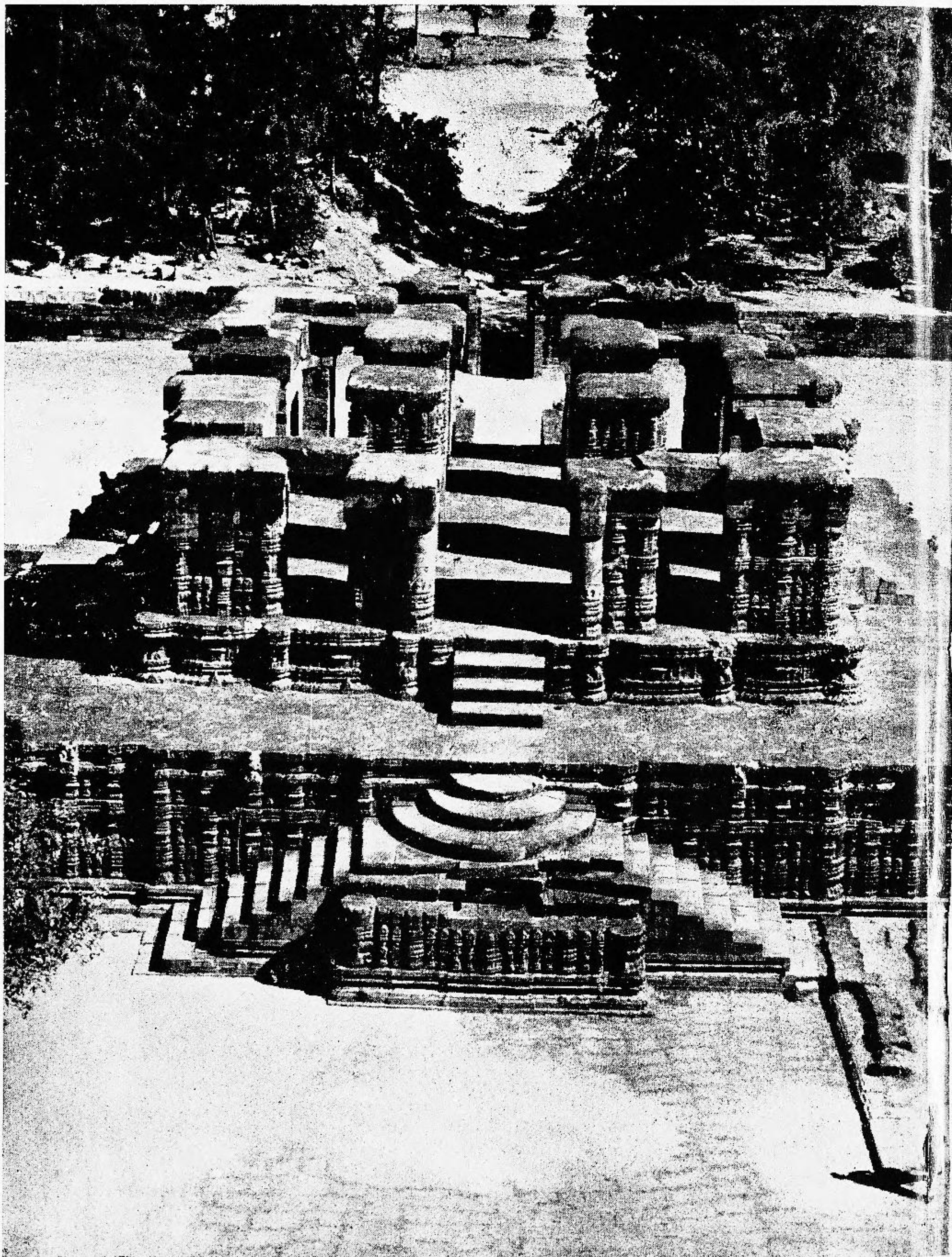
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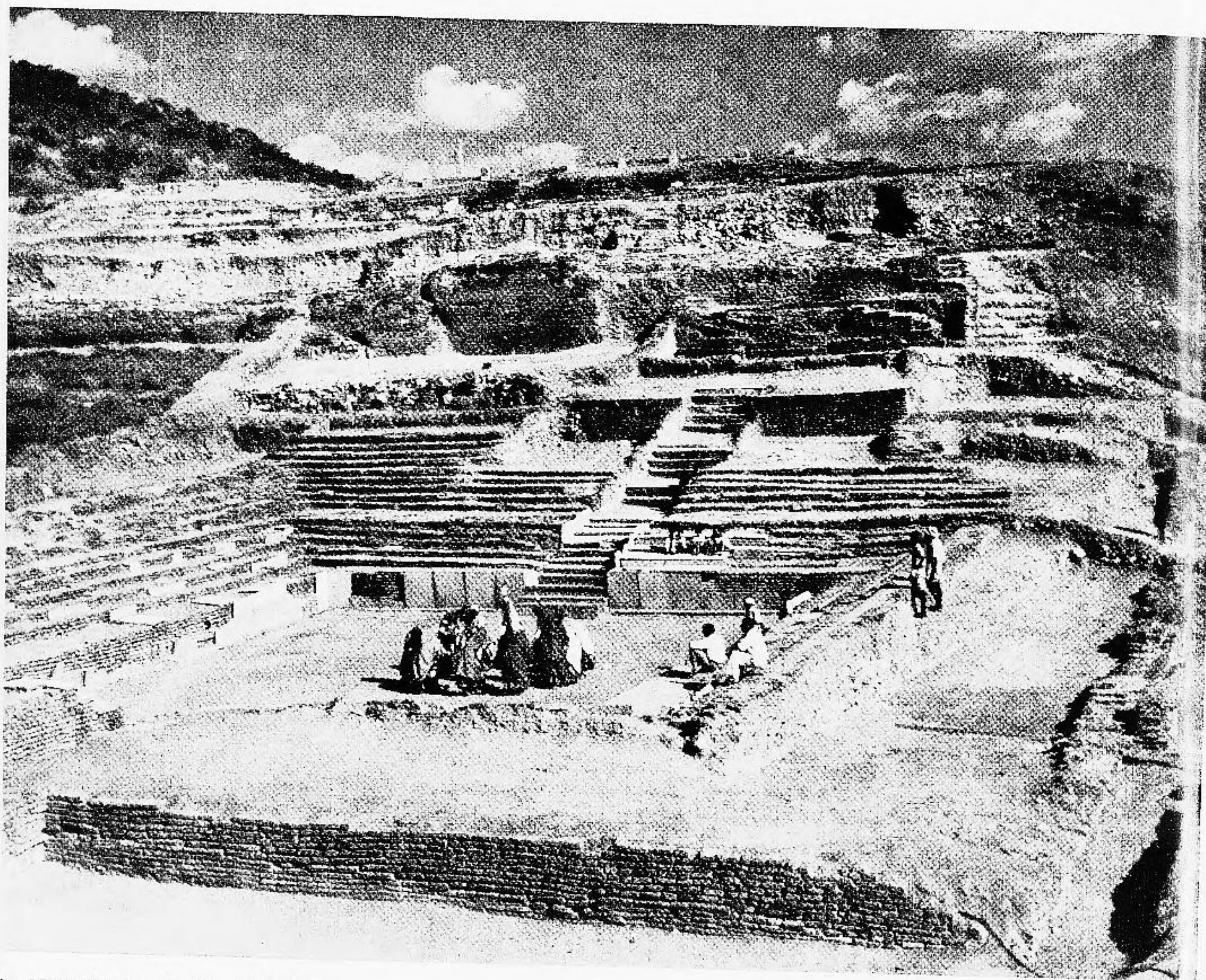
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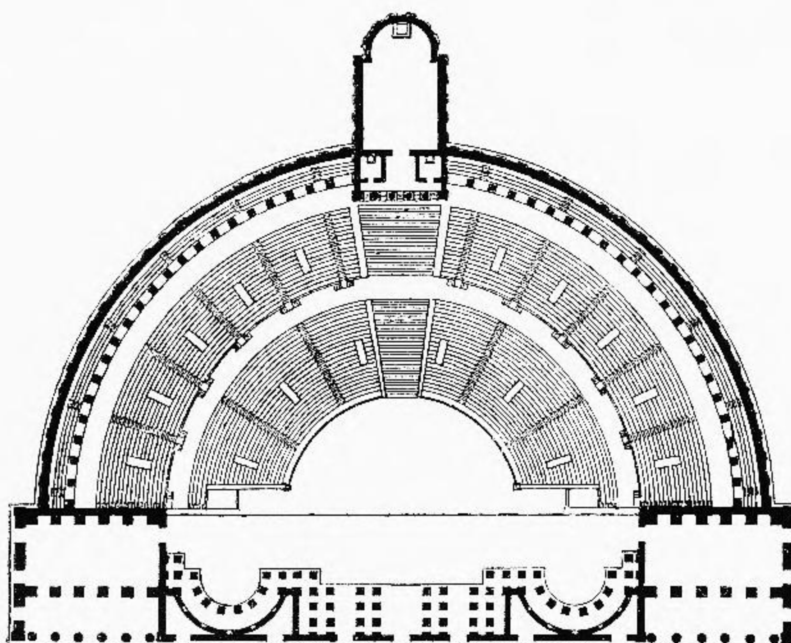


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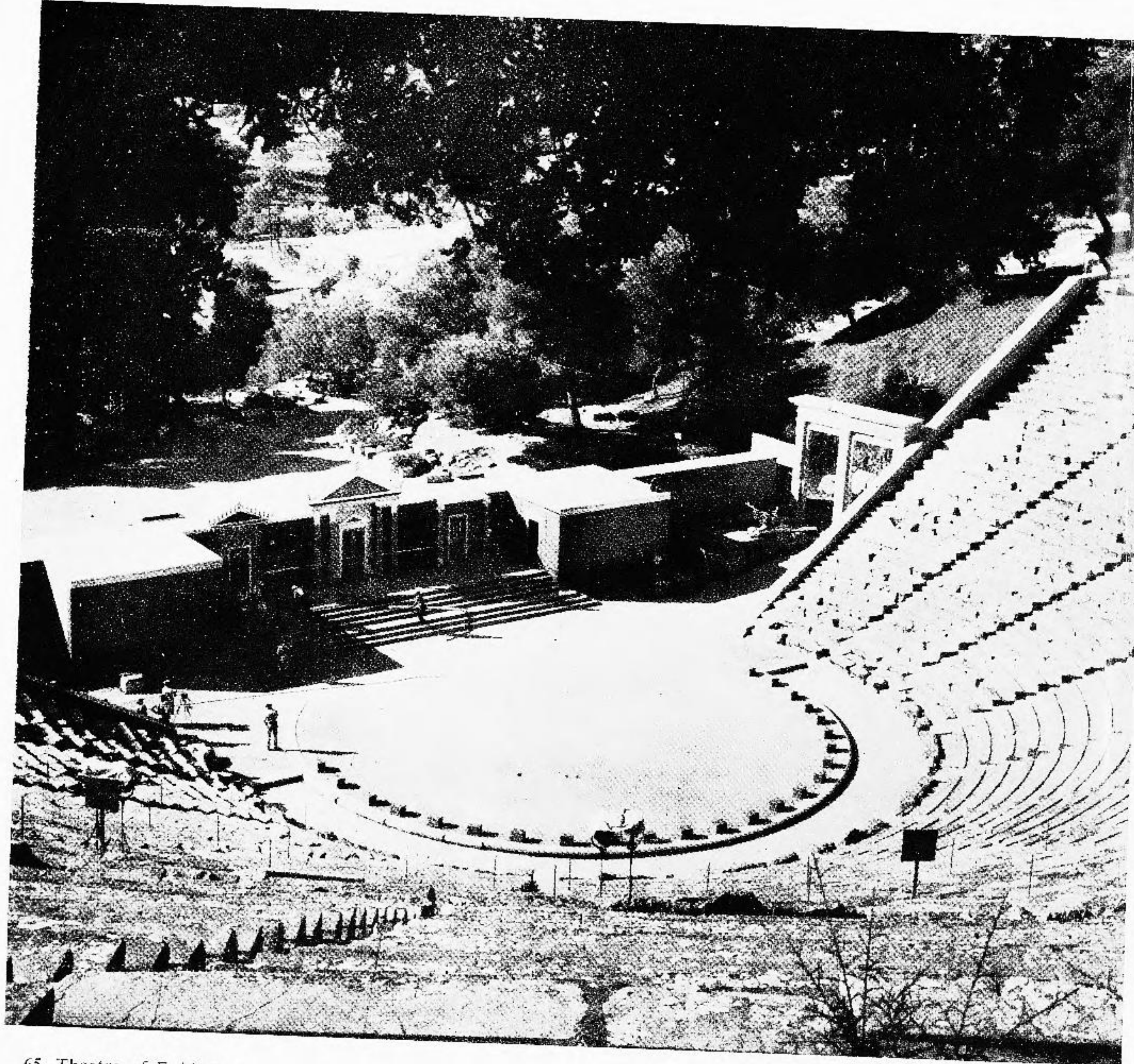




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